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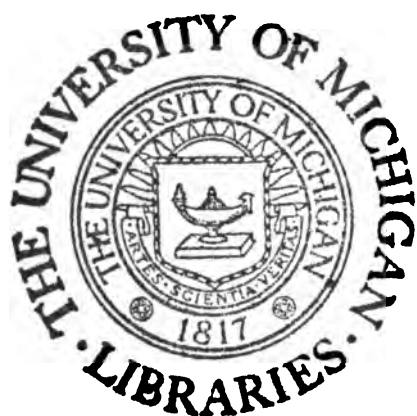
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*Previously issued under the title of
The Children of the Soil*

THE IRONY OF LIFE

The Polanetzki Family

BY

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THE IRONY OF LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

THE new-born day was but one hour old, when Polanetzki reached Kremen. In the days of his childhood he had twice been the guest of the village, whither his mother,—a distant relative of its present owner,—brought him to spend the summer vacation. Polanetzki endeavored to recall to mind this out-of-the-way little hamlet, but it proved no easy task. At night, by the pale light of the moon, everything assumed a different form. Over the weeds, meadows, and swamps a white mist spread itself thick and impenetrable, transforming the environs into a seemingly shoreless lake. This illusion was intensified by the frogs, whose croaking alone broke the awe-inspiring silence of the serene moonlight July night. From time to time, when the chorus of the frogs died away in the mist, there was heard instead the peculiar whistle of the rail-bird, and from the direction of the pond, hidden behind the rows of alder-trees, came the call of the bittern-bird, rising as though from under the ground. Polanetzki could not resist the enchantment of this night. It seemed related to him, and this relation he felt keenly, probably because he had returned but recently from foreign lands, where he had spent the first and best years of his early youth, where he afterward engaged in business pursuits.

At this late hour, with the entrance into the peacefully-slumbering hamlet, the dam of his memory gave way, and reminiscences of his childhood came flowing back to him with a strange vivid force; recollections of a time which

was dear and sacred to him, thanks to his undying love for his mother—dead these five years!

At last his cabriolet entered the village which began at the cross on the hillock. The old cross was bent down and threatened to crumble away. Polanetzki remembered the existence of this cross for its connection with a popular superstition. The cross marked the grave of an unknown suicide found hanging in the neighboring forest, and was carefully avoided by the peasants. Beyond this cross there came the first rows of huts. All the inmates were asleep, not a light was seen in the small square windows. In the light of the moon with a background of clear blue skies, the roofs of the low moss-covered thatched huts looked now silver gray, then pale blue. Some huts were whitewashed, and appeared a bright green. Others half hidden in cherry orchards, or in forests of sun-flowers, were scarcely discernible in the shadow. Dogs barked in the yards, but half-heartedly, lazily, as if echoing the languid croaking of the frogs, the hoarse whistling of the rail-birds, the cries of the bittern, and all other sounds so plentiful on a summer night, which yet strengthen the impression of absolute quiet and stillness.

The cabriolet, moving slowly over the sand-covered road, at last drove into a dark avenue, speckled here and there by streaks of moonlight, stealing through the leaves of the trees. At the end of this avenue night-guards were heard monotonously whistling to each other. A little further on was seen the house of the owner. There was still light in several of its windows. When the cabriolet came thundering up to the porch, a servant ran out from the back part of the house, assisting Polanetzki from the carriage. At the same time the night-guard approached, and with him two white dogs,—evidently quite young, which, instead of barking, frisked at the stranger's feet, and in other ways demonstrated their joy at his arrival. They were finally stopped by the whip of the guard. The servant took Polanetzki's luggage from the top of the cabriolet, and the latter found himself a few moments later in the dining-room, where tea had been prepared. Nothing had changed in this room since his last visit. Near one of its walls stood a massive closet, above it on one

side still hung a clock with heavy weights and a cuckoo ; on the other walls portraits of women in costumes of the last century. A large table covered with a snow white cloth occupied the center of the room. Withal the dining-room, well lighted and filled with the steam of the singing samovar, looked very old, very hospitable and home-like.

Polanetzki began to pace to and fro alongside the table, but the creaking of his shoes alone breaking the reigning silence, confused and surprised him. He approached the window and looked out into the yard, in which the two white dogs romped and played, chasing and falling over each other. Polanetzki did not contemplate this scene very long, for the door of an adjacent room suddenly opened, and before him appeared a young girl, whom he recognized as the daughter of Kremen's owner by his second wife. Polanetzki left the niche of the window, and walking with his creaking shoes to the table bowed to the young girl and introduced himself.

The young lady held out her hand to him.

"We knew of your coming by the telegram," she said. "Father is somewhat indisposed, and has therefore retired early, but to-morrow morning he will be delighted to see you."

"I am not to blame for my rather late arrival," replied Polanetzki—"The train is not due at Chernyov until eleven o'clock."

"Yes, and besides, there are two miles more to travel from Chernyov to Kremen. Father told me that this is not your first visit."

"I have been here twice with my mother, long before you were born."

"I know it. Are you a relative of my father?"

"No ; I am related to Pan Plavitzki's first wife."

"My father highly values bonds of relationship, no matter how distant the relation may be."

The conversation lacking fire, was brought to an abrupt end. She began to pour out tea, dispersing the clouds of vapor arising from the samovar. Silence again reigned supreme in the dining-room, scarcely interrupted by the ticking of the clock. Polanetzki, whom the fair sex in

general interested immensely, began to scan Panna Plavitzka. She was of medium size, very graceful, had dark wavy hair, a kind, yet rather lifeless face, blue eyes and beautiful red lips. It was the face of a woman, serene and tender. And Polanetzki, who found her "quite charming" if not very beautiful, thought that she may be very kind indeed. That there may be hidden rare qualities behind those inexpressive features, virtues possessed only by village maids. Though he was young, Polanetzki had been taught one useful lesson by life, that generally women improve a great deal when known more intimately, while men always lose more and more. He heard of Panna Plavitzka, that the entire management of Kremen, almost ruined, was in her hands. That she was the most industrious creature on earth. Regardless of the heavy load on her shoulders, she seemed to Polanetzki comparatively easy-going and serene. She was evidently very sleepy, for her eyes blinked incessantly at the light of the hanging lamp. Of course, she would have passed his examination with much more credit to herself, had not the conversation been so slow and commonplace. But this was natural at their first meeting. Besides, she received the guest alone, which, for a young girl of less tact, might have been a very, difficult and unpleasant task. And, lastly, she knew quite well that Polanetzki entered their house not as a guest, but as a creditor. He came for money.

Years ago the mother of Polanetzki gave Pan Plavitzki twenty thousand roubles, taking a mortgage on the estate. This sum Polanetzki was eager to collect. First, because Plavitzki was not prompt nor punctual in his payments of the interest; and, second, because Polanetzki, having become a partner of a mercantile firm in Warsaw, engaged in various enterprises, was badly in need of the money himself. He was determined to make no concessions but demand his capital in full. In affairs of such nature he always wished to remain stoical and firm in his decision. By nature of a different temperament, he created for himself out of this firmness a sort of principle, often going from one extreme to another, like so many others that nurse an idea.

Thus even now gazing at this kind-faced sleepy maiden,

he fought the feeling of sympathy awakening in his soul, and repeated to himself :

"Everything is all right, my dear, but pay your debts you *must*."

Then after a short pause, he added aloud :

"I was told that you manage the entire estate ; do you really love housekeeping ?"

"I love Kremen very much," evasively answered Panna Plavitzka.

"And so did I, when I was a mere boy, and yet I would not wish to take care of its affairs, the conditions are so unfavorable."

"Yes, very unfavorable. But we are doing all in our power —"

"That is, *you* are doing it all ?"

"I only assist my father who is very often ill."

"I don't claim to know much of such affairs, but from all I observe, I should conclude that most of your farmers cannot hope for a comfortable future."

"Our hopes are with God."

"Yes, that is probable. But one cannot send his creditors to Him !"

The face of Panna Plavitzka flushed crimson. An unpleasant pause ensued.

Polanetzki meanwhile thought to himself : "Once begun, it must be ended."

"Will you permit me to explain the object of my visit ?" said he in loud tones.

The young girl turned her eyes to him, and in that look Polanetzki could read :

"You have just arrived. It is very late. I am scarcely alive with fatigue. Mere politeness should have prevented you from beginning such a conversation."

"I know why you came," replied she ; "but it were much better that you speak to father about it."

"Very well. Pardon me."

"It is I who must ask your forgiveness. Every man has a right to demand his own, and I am accustomed to such demands. But to-day is Saturday—there is always plenty to do on Saturdays. At times when the Jews come to us with their bills, I manage to get along with

them myself. But now I prefer to have you arrange it all with father. It will be much easier for both of us."

"Till to-morrow then!" said Polanetzki, who lacked the boldness to confess that in financial matters he preferred to be treated like a Jew.

"Won't you have some more tea?" asked the young hostess.

"No, thank you. Good-night!"

Polanetzki rose and extended his hand. The young girl held out her own, but in her action there was less welcome than at their first meeting. Polanetzki barely touched her fingers.

"The servant will show you your room," she said before departing.

Polanetzki was left alone. He felt dissatisfied, although he would not admit it, and tried to persuade himself that he had acted wisely. "Had he come here for his money or for indulging in flatteries? What was Panna to him?" Neither good nor bad could ever accrue to him from that quarter. If she considers him a brute, an impolite dunner, the better for him. It is always thus—the more stubborn, the more obnoxious the creditor, the sooner his claim is satisfied.

And yet this logical conclusion somehow failed to bring him the expected ease of mind, and a certain inner voice whispered to him that in this particular case there was no question of his poor breeding, but it was a lack of sympathy for a poor overworked woman. Besides he felt that acting as he did, he appeased his greed for money, but went against his own heart and his inborn instincts. He finally became angered at Panna Plavitska, the more so that he really began to like her. As in that slumbering little hamlet, in that moonlight night, so in this plain girl of the woods he found something of his own, something he sought in vain in the women he met abroad, and this "something" excited him more than he anticipated. But men often feel ashamed of their kind generous feelings. At first Polanetzki blushed inwardly for his unpardonable excitement, wherefore he determined to remain stoical and merciless and press old Plavitzka to the wall, giving him no quarter, showing no mercy.

The servant conducted him to his bedchamber. This was the same room he had slept in when on the visit with his mother, during the life-time of Plavitzki's first wife. Floods of recollection swept over him in an instant. The windows of this room opened in to the garden, beyond which there was a pond. The bright moon was reflected in the still clear waters of this pond, which was now seen to better advantage. The old ash tree that concealed it from view in former days had succumbed to the storm, and in its place there was now a pitiful remnant—a stump glistening in the moonlight. The stump, the pond, and the garden, with not a quiver of life in the dark shady walks, all produced an impression of absolute quiet and rest. Polanetzki, accustomed to the constant tumult and whirl of large cities, laboring under physical and nervous strain, unwillingly felt the quiet effect of the village, like that felt by a man taking a warm bath after long and tedious labors. He felt a certain relief creeping into his soul. He tried to think of his business affairs, what turn they would probably take under certain circumstances, whether profitable or not, tried to wonder over his relations with his partner, Bigel, but made a dismal failure. Instead of all these the thought foremost in his mind was Panna Plavitzka, who, although she made a favorable impression, was nothing to him as yet, it having been their first meeting. Yet she interested him as a type. He was a little over thirty, of an age when the human instinct mercilessly forces the man to obtain and build his hearth, to take a wife unto him, and create a family. The most intense pessimism is powerless face to face with this instinct. No axiom or any other dogmas of life can overcome it. Thanks to this instinct many misanthropes marry regardless of their philosophy, artists, notwithstanding their art, as all such people that claim to devote to their pet ideas and professions their whole lives. Exceptions are few, and they prove the axiom that the world cannot live a conventional lie and go against the current of nature.

Polanetzki was neither a misanthrope, an artist, nor a man propagating anti-matrimonial theories. On the contrary, he wished to marry, was convinced that marry he must, and feeling that his time had come, looked around

for a suitable woman. This was the cause of that anxiety and solicitude which women aroused in him, especially young girls. Meeting in his path a young girl, his first question to himself was :

“Is it she?” or at least “Is it something like her?”

At this moment his thought circled round Panna Plavitzka. He had heard much about her from her relatives living in Warsaw, and all reports were very flattering to the young girl. Now her serene kind face was before his eyes. He recalled her beautiful hands with long fingers, her dark blue eyes, and even the black birth-marks over her upper lip. Her voice, musical and caressing, enchanted him. Thus it happened, that although he repeatedly urged himself to show no leniency, to make no concession, and receive his money in full, he was angry, nevertheless, at himself, and at the fate that brought him to Kremen as a creditor.

The cocks began to crow. The window-panes grew pale, then green, and yet he continued to see, with his eyes closed, the tender face of Panna Plavitzka, the birth-marks over her upper lip, and her hands that poured out the tea. Then, when sleep began to rob his senses, it seemed to him that he held her hand and drew her to his breast, while she resisted and turned away her pretty head, as if wishing to evade his kiss.

The next morning he awoke late, and recalling Panna Plavitzka, thought, “Ah, this is how she looks, the charmer!”

CHAPTER II.

POLANETZKI was aroused by the entrance of the servant who brought him his morning coffee and took his garments to be brushed.

When the servant returned with the same a few moments later, Polanetzki inquired:

"Do not your master and mistress come together for breakfast in the dining-room?"

"No," replied the servant. "They do not, because the young lady rises very early, while the old master sleeps late."

"Is the young lady up already?"

"She has been to church this last hour."

"Oh! yes. To-day is Sunday. But does she not ride to church with the old master?"

"No, master rides to church for late mass, after which he pays a visit to the deacon. The young lady prefers to come home early."

"How do your master and mistress spend their Sundays?"

"They spend them at home. For dinner they always have a visitor—Pan Goutovski."

Polanetzki knew this Pan Goutovski from childhood. In those days he nicknamed him "Little Bear," for Goutovski was fat, clumsy and a grumbler. The servant further enlightened Polanetzki that Goutovski's father had died five years ago, and the young man managed his own affairs in Yabrijikow.

"And he comes here regularly every Sunday?" further queried Polanetzki.

"Sometimes also during week days, after sunset."

"A rival," thought Polanetzki, and after a short pause, asked:

"Has the master been up long?"

"I believe he rang the bell a while ago, for I saw Yozef hasten to his chamber."

"Who is Yozef?"

"His valet."

"And who are you?"

"I am only his assistant."

"Go and inquire how soon I may present myself to your master."

The servant departed, but returned a moment later.

"Master wishes me to tell you that he will be delighted to see you as soon as he is dressed."

"Very well."

The servant left him. Polanetzki began to wait, or rather to be bored. He waited long. At last his patience reached its end, and in disgust he wished to leave his room and take a peep at the garden. Just at that moment, however, Yozef entered the room and announced that his master invited the guest to his apartments. He conducted Polanetzki through a long corridor into the bed-chamber of Plavitzki, situated at the other end of the house. Polanetzki entered the room and at first failed to recognize Plavitzki. He remembered him as a handsome, strong man. Now before him there stood a man with a face wrinkled as a baked apple, a face to which even the carefully dyed moustaches added little in the way of youthful charms. As the moustaches, so the black hair combed on the side merely proved unsustained pretensions to a beauty that was not there."

At the sight of Polanetzki, Plavitzki opened his arms, and exclaimed:

"Ah, Stach! How are you, my dearest boy! Come to my arms!"

And pointing to his white vest, he pressed Polanetzki's head to his breast. This embrace lasted long, too long for Polanetzki. At last Plavitzki said: "Permit me to look at you! Just like Anna! A true copy of Anna. My poor, my dear Anna!"

And Plavitzki wept, or was supposed to do so, for he wiped with his middle finger the eyelids of his right eye where tears, by the way, were invisible, and repeated: "A true copy of Anna! Your mother, my lad, was always my best, my most beloved relation."

Polanetzki stood, partly confused, partly puzzled with

the reception, which he no more expected than he did the odor of powder and various perfumes, which came from the face, moustaches and vest of Plavitzki.

"How are you, uncle?" at last said Polanetzki, thinking that the name by which he called Plavitzki when a child would suit best his present solemn mood.

"How am I?" repeated Plavitzki, "not long shall I bide in this world, not long! That is why my reception is so cordial, so father-like. And if the blessing of a man with one foot in the grave, if the blessing of the oldest member of the family will find appreciation in your eyes, I give it to you from the fulness of my heart."

"And, for the second time embracing Polanetzki's head, he kissed it and made the sign of the cross over it. The countenance of the young man bore a still more puzzled and worried expression. His mother was only a distant relation and friend of Plavitzki's first wife. He, himself, as far back as he could remember, was never personally attached to the old man by either bonds of friendship or relationship, and this solemn, effusive reception, to which he unwillingly submitted, was highly disagreeable to him. At the same time the thought flashed through his mind:

"This old monkey instead of speaking about money hopes to satisfy me with blessings."

And a rage took possession of his soul, a just indignation that promised to be beneficial to him in clinging stoically to his decision. Meanwhile Plavitzki resumed:

"Be seated, my dearest, and make yourself comfortable, be at home!"

Polanetzki sat down and began:

I am delighted at the opportunity to pay you a visit, uncle. I should have done this sooner or later for pleasure's sake, pure and simple, I assure you—But you know, uncle, that the real object of my coming here at present is the little affair which my mother——"

But Plavitzki interrupted him, suddenly putting his hand on his guest's knee.

"Did you drink my coffee?" he asked, in the simplest possible manner.

"I—I did," replied Polanetzki, fairly driven off his own track.

"I make this inquiry because Marinya went to church very early. Pardon me also for not having installed you in my own room, but I am getting old and accustomed to sleep here. This is my nest——"

He accentuated his words by making a sweeping gesture with his hand around the room.

Involuntarily Polonetzki followed him with his eyes. In former days this room presented a great temptation to him, for it was abundantly decorated with all sorts of weapons hanging on its walls. The only change in the room his eyes could detect was the wallpaper presenting numberless squares, each containing a shepherdess dressed *à la Watteau*, and angling in a stream. Near the window stood a toilet-stand covered with a white table-cloth, on which there was, beside a mirror in a silver frame, a multitude of various glasses, bottles, boxes, brushes, combs, files for the nails, and what not. In short, this was a room of an old bachelor and egotist, constantly burdened with petty cares about his own comforts. Polanetzki never allowed himself to think for a moment that Plavitzki would part with "his nest" for a single night.

"Did you sleep well?" continued the host.

"Thank you, quite well—got up too late."

"Of course, you are going to spend a week with us?"

Polanetzki, being impulsive, sprang from his chair.

"Don't you know that I have a business in Warsaw,—that I have a partner, who is now alone managing our affairs? I would like to leave Kremen as soon as possible, as soon, in fact, as I complete the arrangements which brought me hither."

"No, my boy," replied Plavitzki, with a certain cordial authority. "To-day is Sunday. Besides, feelings of relationship are above all business arrangements. To-day I received you as a relative, and to-morrow, if you wish, you may come to me as a creditor. Yes, that's it. To-day there came to me my Stach, the son of my Anna! Until to-morrow it must be so, Stach. Thus speaks your old relative, who dearly loves you, for whom you must make this concession."

Polanetzki's face wrinkled. However, he replied:

"Very well, then. We'll postpone it till to-morrow."

"Well said, my boy! Now I recognize the son of my Anna. Do you smoke a pipe?"

"No, I only smoke cigarettes."

"Bad, very bad; but for guests I also keep cigarettes."

Further conversation was interrupted by the clatter of horses' hoofs. Polanetzki looked through the open window and saw a maiden, dressed all in pink, with a wide straw hat, getting out of a carriage.

"This is Marinya coming home from early mass," said Plavitzki, "have you made her acquaintance?"

"Yes, sir, I had that pleasure last night."

"A dear child! I need not tell you that I only live for her."

At this moment the door opened, and a young voice asked: "May I?"

"Yes, certainly: Stach is here!" answered Plavitzki.

Marinya quickly entered the room, her hat hanging by the ribbons over her shoulders; and embracing her father, gave Polanetzki her little hand.

Dressed in a pink calico dress, she looked charming, fresh and bright as the clear sunny morning, which gave her face an expression of vigor and energy. Her hair was partly disheveled, her cheeks rivalled her pink dress in color, her mouth breathed health and youth.

"To-day the late mass will begin a little later than usual," said she, addressing her father. "The priest left church after early mass for the mill to administer the last sacraments to the dying Panna Syatkowska. She is very low, they say. You have half-an-hour's more time, father."

"Very well," replied Plavitzki. "You may utilize this unexpected reprieve to form a nearer acquaintance with Pan Polanetzki. I tell you—a true copy of Anna. But then you have never seen her. Remember, Marinya, that to-morrow he may be our creditor, but to-day—he is our relative and guest."

"Splendid! I am delighted!" said the young girl, "this means that we shall spend a merry Sunday to-day."

"Last night you went to bed so late," remarked Polanetzki, "and this morning you took in early mass."

"Yes," gaily answered Marinya. "There were two of

us at early mass, myself and the cook. We both gain thereby plenty of time to discuss the dinner."

"I have forgotten to deliver to you the sincerest regards of Panni Emilya Chavastovska."

"Thank you! I have not seen her for two years, but our correspondence is kept up with the old vigor. She intends to leave for Reichenhall for the sake of her child, I understand?"

"Yes, when I left Warsaw she was almost ready to take her departure."

"And how is her child?"

"For her twelve years she has grown more than is good for her, but she is very apathetical. It seems to me she is anything but well physically."

"Do you often visit Emilya?"

"Yes. She is my only friend in Warsaw. Besides, I love her dearly."

"Tell me, my boy," interposed Plavitzki, taking from the toilet-stand a brand-new pair of gloves and tenderly depositing them in his side-pocket, "what is your occupation in Warsaw?"

"I am, what they call, a speculator. I have established in Warsaw a commercial firm together with another young man, a certain Mr. Bigel. Our speculations are in grain, sugar, forests, land—in a word, on whatever chance or fate is kind enough to give us a tip."

"I heard that you were an engineer."

"I have my specialty. But on my return from abroad I could find no berth in a factory, and therefore plunged into commerce. I know a thing or two about it myself, and my partner is not a newcomer, either. But my real specialty is that of dyer——"

"Beg pardon. How did you say?"

"A dyer."

"Yes, times are such now that a man will do almost anything," said Plavitzki with dignity. "Of course I will not condemn you for it, as long as you preserve the noble old traditions of our family; trade, I hope, does not disgrace the man."

Polanetzki, who had regained his good humor at the sight of the young girl, felt highly amused by the words

of Plavitzki, laughed heartily, showing his strong, white teeth, and said :

"Thank God ! I can't complain."

Marinya, too, smiled and said :

"Emily thinks the world of you. She wrote to me that you conduct your affairs most brilliantly."

"Y—yes, one can exist. It's a little difficult to handle the Jews, otherwise, competition is always possible. But even the Jews, if one does not publish anti-semitic manifestoes, but manages his business calmly and honestly, will never press one to the wall. As to Panni Chavastovska, I am afraid, she understands as much or as little of business as her little Lida."

"You are right. She never has been practical. If it were not for her brother-in-law, Theophuil Chavastovska, she would have lost her entire estate. But Theophuil adores Lida."

"Who does not love her ? I myself am the first to dance attendance. She is such a dear, handsome child. I positively have a weakness for that little witch."

Marinya looked at his sincere, animated face and thought :

"He is probably a quick-tempered man, but a good soul withal."

Meanwhile Plavitzki declared that it was time to go to church, and began to take leave of Marinya. It took him as long as if he were undertaking a journey of several months' duration. At length he made over her the sign of the cross and took his hat. Marinyashook Polanetzki's hand with more warmth than at her first meeting. Polanetzki sitting in the carriage beside the old man, and listening to his chatter, thought :

"Very, very handsome ! A very sympathetic girl !"

Having passed the avenue, over which Polanetzki rode the night before, the carriage reached a highway, partly shaded with old, half-rotten trees, symmetrically planted on its edge. On one side of the road there ran before their eyes a green potato field, on the other a corn field, with the ripe, tall ears as if slumbering beneath the rays of the sun. In the distance were seen peasant girls in their bright colored Sunday dresses, with red kerchiefs

round their necks, walking slowly along the paths among the grain, seeming like big crowns of blooming poppies.

"Lovely corn!" remarked Polanetzki.

"Not bad. We are doing all in our power; for the rest we rely on Him. You are young yet, my dearest, therefore I take the liberty to give you advice, which in days to come will surely be of great use to you—do anything and everything you possibly can; the rest leave to God. He knows best what we need. The crop this year will be immense, and I knew it before, for—whenever God wishes to try me, he sends an evil omen beforehand."

"What is that?" asked Polanetzki in astonishment.

"From under the pipes—smoking pipes in my room—I know not whether you have seen where they stand—on almost every occasion, when something of importance is about to occur, a little mouse comes out, appearing for several days in succession."

"There must be a hole somewhere in the room?"

"No," said Plavitzki, mysteriously closing his eyes.

"Why don't you put a cat near the spot in the room?"

"What for? If such is the will of God the mouse is surely a warning to me, and I dare not go against His will. But this year the mouse has not made its appearance. I have discussed it already with Marinya. Perhaps the good Lord wishes to convince us that He is watching over us. I know what people say about us. That we are ruined, or at least that our affairs need mending. But you judge for yourself: Kremen, together with the other hamlets, Skoki, Magyerovka, and Suhotsin, have an acreage worth 750,000 roubles. There is about 30,000 roubles due on the land to the company, and about a hundred thousand more in the way of private mortgages. Let's say a total of 130,000 roubles, which will make together the round sum of 850,000 roubles."

"How do you come to this conclusion?" interrupted Polanetzki. "You add your debts to the value of your land?"

"Had my land been valueless no one would have advanced a grosh on it, would they? That is why I make this addition."

"He's crazy!" thought Polanetzki; "conversation with him is a waste of time."

"Magyerovka I will sell to the peasants in parts," continued Plavitzki. "The mill shall be sold to the highest bidder. In Skoki and Suhotsin there is a rich lay of mergel (mica)—do you know of what enormous value? Fully two million roubles."

"Of course you have been offered that sum. Who is the purchaser?"

"Two years ago there came to me a certain speculator and examined the fields. True, he departed, not closing the deal, but I am almost positive he will return; otherwise, the little mouse would not fail to show up from under the pipes, would it now? Ah, . . . of course. Let him return. Do you know what happy idea just struck me? You are a speculator yourself, are you not? Take this veritable gold mine into your hands, find capital, organize a company——"

"Chasing the rainbow is not in my line."

"Find me a buyer, then, and ten per cent of the entire amount shall be your reward."

"What does Marinya think of this rich deposit?"

"What is Marinya? A dear jewel of a child, but—a child! She, too, believes that God's mercy will not abandon us."

"Yes, I heard her express the same words last night."

Thus conversing, the old man warming up more and more, his guest answering in syllables, they reached the church, situated on an eminence, surrounded by trees. Below, at the foot of the hill, there were lined in a row the humble wagons of the peasants and the more pretentious vehicles of the gentry. Plavitzki made the sign of the cross. "This is our church, which you, no doubt, remember. All the Plavitzkis are buried in its yard. Soon I, too, shall find eternal rest here. In no other place do I pray as fervently as in this old, moss-grown church."

"It seems to be crowded," remarked Polanetzki. "Yes, here is the sulky of Goutovski, the carriages of Zazimski Yamish, and many others. I presume you remember the Yamishes. She is a wonderful woman, while he claims to be a successful farmer, but in reality a capital fool who never understood his wife."

At that moment the bells of the church began to pour into the still, fragrant air their rich, vibrating sounds.

"Evidently our arrival was noticed," said Plavitzki—"the Liturgy will begin at once. After mass I will take you to the grave of my first wife; pray for her . . . She was your aunt. A remarkable woman she was, peace to her soul!"

Plavitzki raised his hand to wipe a tear that was slow in coming, while Polanetzki, in order to distract the old man from his solemn mood, asked:

"And Panni Yamish, I believe, was a great beauty in those days, was she not? Is this the same?"

The countenance of Plavitzki cleared up instantly. He projected the end of his tongue, and slapping Polanetzki's shoulder, replied:

"Ah, my boy, she is worth going after, even now—'pon my soul, she is worth it."

They entered the church through the vestry rooms, to avoid being jostled by the crowd.

Plavitzki occupied a bench next to the Yamishes. Panni Yamish looked very old, with an intelligent but enervated face, that bore the stamp of some great suffering. She was a woman of about sixty years, dressed in calico, like Marinya, a straw hat gracing her still majestic head. The polite bow of Plavitzki and her friendly smiles left no room for doubt that between these two people that have seen better days there still existed a relation of mutual respect and admiration. The lady produced from somewhere a pair of opera-glasses and began to examine minutely the face and form of Polanetzki, evidently at sea about his identity.

On a bench behind them one of the neighboring farmers, taking advantage of the delay in the service, put the finishing touches to a spicy hunting yarn, saying in a semi-whisper: "My hounds are great hunters; indeed they are." After which declaration he began an animated debate with his neighbor about Pan Plavitzki and Panni Yamish in tones so loud that Polanetzki could hear every word.

At length the service began. At the sight of that praying congregation and that old church Polanetzki mentally

made a lightning trip back to the days of his childhood, when, awe-inspired, he had sat beside his mother, and unwillingly he marveled at the evident fact that so little had changed in the village, where only men come and go, but everything else remains the same. Some people are buried in the cemeteries they have helped to build, others take their place, but the new life gradually assumes the old shape and form, and to him who visits the village after an absence of many years everything seems untouched, unaltered, by Father Time, in the same position as he left it on the day of his departure. The same old church, the same crowd of peasants, blonde-haired and cheerful, the men in gray coats and top-boots, just dipped in tar, the girls in red kerchiefs, with wreaths of flowers on their golden heads. Near one of the windows grew the same old birch tree, which covered the window and filled the church with a greenish light. Only the people were apparently not the same. A part of those he knew in former days had gone to a better world, and their graves were a mass of green grass and fragrant flowers, others were bent down as if looking to mother earth for eternal rest.

Polanetzki who loved to brag that he always evaded all discussions and observations of the masses, now left to himself and his thoughts, unwillingly began to study the interesting faces and types around him, and incidentally ponder over the question, what an abyss lay between the in-born natural passion for life at any price, and the necessity to die. He thought that was probably the cause why all philosophical systems pass into oblivion, like shadows, and only early and late masses are held in the same old way, alone promising an incessant, continuous existence.

Having been brought up abroad, he was not a staunch believer, at least he lacked the faith that asks no questions, the faith that is blind. He felt, like almost all intelligent men of our day, a strong loathing for materialism, yet he could find no remedy for it, or rather he did not seek any. He was a pessimist, pure and simple, but did not base his theories on scientific deductions. He was one of those that are longing for something, they know

not what, and cannot find it. He intoxicated himself with physical labor, to which he became accustomed more and more, but at the moments of severe attacks of pessimism he put the question to himself, "What is all this for? why this useless hoarding of money, these incessant labors to obtain lands, to marry, to raise a family, if everything, if all this must finally end in death?" But such attacks were very rare, and their effects were soon forgotten. He was saved by his vigorous youth, by a certain physical and mental strength, a self-preserving instinct, a vitality of character, and finally by that elementary power that pushes a man into the arms of a woman. Thus, passing from reminiscences of his childhood to the grim thoughts of death, from the doubts in the felicity of married life, to the thought of what there was best and noblest in him, which was lost to the world for the want of a loving soul, he finally came to think of Marinya Plavitzka, whose pink dress, covering a lithe-like and graceful body, did not leave his brain for a moment. He remembered that on leaving Warsaw he was told by his friend Emilya Chavastovska:

"If you, being in Kremen, will neglect to fall in love with Marinya, I shall close my doors before your nose, on your return."

He replied that his object in making the trip was merely to press Plavitzki to the wall and get as much money out of the operation as possible, but no lovemaking was in his program.

But that was not true. Had there been no young girl of reputed charm in Kremen, he would have brought Plavitzki to terms by means of letters, or through the court. She occupied his thoughts during the whole length of the journey. Her looks, her character puzzled and interested him, and more than once he was angry at himself that his otherwise pleasant trip was marred by his obnoxious task of collecting money. Urging himself to remain firm, he decided to get his own, first of all, ready to go to any lengths for its sake. He clung to this decision the first night, when Marinya failed to make the impression he anticipated. But this morning her severe simple beauty caught his eye.

"She is beautiful as the morning," repeated he to himself—and she is fully conscious of it. . . woman always know when they are beautiful! . . ."

This last discovery made him impatient, and he was anxious to return to Kremen, to continue his observations of women in general, in the shape of that sample he found there. At last the service was at an end. Plavitzki left the church at once, having two duties to perform: first, to pray over the graves of his two wives, who lay snugly and quietly amid a sea of green grass; and second, to conduct Panni Yamish to her carriage. He had no desire to miss either one of these functions, and consequently, took time by the forelock. Polanetzki followed him and soon they were at the tombstones near the church wall. Plavitzki knelt down, murmured a silent prayer, rose, wiped away a few imaginary tears, and taking Polanetzki's arm, said:

"Y-e-s, my boy, both are dead, I alone must drag along."

In the meantime, Panni Yamish accompanied by her husband walked majestically out from the church and down the hill. Behind them marched the two neighbors that indulged in such uncharitable conversation, at her expense, and Pan Goutovski.

Plavitzki bent to Polanetzki's ear and whispered: When she enters her carriage, notice what a lovely ankle, what a charming little foot she has!" A moment later they joined the small group. Plavitzka introduced Polanetzki in due form, and turning to Yamish, added with the smile of a man about to say a very witty thing:

"This is my relative. . . . He came here to press my hand, . . . and press me to the wall. . . ."

"We will gladly permit him to do the first, but as for the second he'll have to face us," replied Panni Yamish.

"But Kremen (in Russian, Kremen means a sort of rock) is a hard stone, and although my relative is young, he may be in danger of breaking his teeth upon it."

Panni Yamish blinked her eyes.

"With what ease," said she, "you fire away your sparkling *bon mots* to-day! . . . *C'est inouï!*—How is your health?"

"At this moment I feel healthy and young."

"And Marinya?"

"She was here at early mass. We are expecting you at five. My young hostess is now busy with the dinner."

"Very well, we will not disappoint you if my neuralgia will permit me . . . also, the master, my husband. . . ."

"How about it, neighbor?" inquired Plavitzki.

"I'm highly honored, I'm sure. With pleasure!" replied with apathy, Pan Yamish.

"In such case, *au revoir!*"

"*Au revoir!*" answered the lady, and, turning to Polanetzki, she shook hands with him.

"I am delighted to make your acquaintance," said she.

Plavitzki offered her his arm and led her to the carriage. The two pious neighbors had taken leave of each other and departed. Polanetzki remained for a moment in the company of Goutovski, who looked at him with ill-concealed displeasure. Polanetzki remembered him a clumsy, awkward boy. That grumbling "Little Bear" had developed into a strong, large-proportioned, heavily built man, rather handsome than otherwise, with a light mustache. Polanetzki was not disposed to break the silence, expecting Goutovski to supply a theme for conversation, but the latter, his hands in his pockets, stood motionless and silent, as if planted in the earth.

"The same old manners," thought Polanetzki, and turned his head away in disgust.

In the meantime Plavitzki returned from his gallant mission and asked Polanetzki: "Did you notice? What a marvel of a little foot!"

"Well, Goutovski," added he, turning to the latter, "there is no room for you to-day in my carriage, there only being two seats."

"Yes. I shall come in my own. I am bringing a dog for Marinya," answered the young man, and, nodding his head, went to his sulky.

A minute later Plavitzki and Polanetzki were on their homeward trip to Kremen.

"This Goutovski, it seems to me, is also one of your numerous relations."

"A very distant one. The family has been growing

poorer and poorer for the last three decades. All the earthly possessions of this Adolph consist of a diminutive imitation of a village, and freezing emptiness of purse."

"But his heart must be full."

Plavitzki shrugged his shoulders.

"So much the worse for him if his dreams carry him too far," he said. "He may be a good and honest man, but he is slow and stupid. No education, no knowledge of worldly affairs, no estates. But Marinya likes him, or rather endures him."

"Ah, she endures him?"

"You see, it's this way; I sacrifice myself for her by burying myself in this wilderness; she does the same for me and clings to the village. The country around here is wild and uninteresting. Panni Yamish—a jewel of a woman—is too old for her. There is a woful lack of young folks, and our life is a monotonous, tedious existence. But what would you do? Remember, my boy, that life at best is a chain of self-sacrifices. This principle one must bear with him in his heart as well as in his mind, especially those who belong to the more honest and noble families. Goutovski dines with us every Sunday, and to-day, as you have heard, he is bringing a dog for Marinya."

Both grew silent, and the carriage slowly rolled over the sandy road. Behind them in his sulky rode Goutovski, who, thinking of Polanetzki, repeated to himself: "If he came to ruin them, as a creditor, I will break his neck, and if, as a rival for Marinya's hand, I'll do the same."

Goutovski from the early days of his childhood feared and hated Polanetzki for his sarcastic remarks, his airs of superiority, and his blows. Polanetzki was two years older and a fighter.

At last, after ten minutes' silent ride, they reached Kremen, and half an hour later, all assembled in the dining-room. The young dog, brought by Goutovski, taking advantage of his privileges as a guest, romped under the table, put his paws on the knees of the diners, and joyously wagged his tail.

"This is a Gordon setter," remarked Goutovski. "He is very young yet and foolish, but generally these dogs are

bright and clever, and very much attached to their masters."

"Yes, it's a good dog, no doubt, for which I am heartily thankful to you," said the young girl, looking at the shining skin of the dog and the yellow circles over his eyes.

"Too good!" grumbled Plavitzki, covering his knees with a napkin.

"In the field they are better than the ordinary setters."

"Are you, too, fond of hunting?" asked Polanetzki, addressing Marinya.

"No, I am not game," said she with a smile, "and you?"

"I do hunt, but very seldom. I live in a city, you know."

"Are you a society man?" asked Plavitzki.

"Not much. I make very few calls, and receive no one. Exceptions are Panni Chavastovska, my partner Bigel, and Vaskovski, my former teacher, who has become very eccentric of late—and no others. Of course my business transactions occasionally bring me into various other circles, but this is a rare occurrence."

"This is bad, my boy. A young man must preserve good relationship with people of note, especially if he be gifted with all qualifications therefor. Whoever finds no attraction in society need not bother; but you, a Polanetzki, must keep in touch with everything. I have had the same trouble with Marinya. Two years ago, on her eighteenth birthday, I took her to Warsaw. You know that such bringing-out undertakings are planned with certain objects in view, and it cost me many a little sacrifice. But what was the result? The whole day long she spent with Emilyya Chavastovska, reading books. She has been born wild, and, I'm afraid, will remain so till her days are ended: you may shake hands on that."

"Let's shake hands, then," exclaimed Polanetzki, good humoredly.

"Unfortunately I can't," answered Marinya, laughing, "because papa is wrong. It's true I read books with Emilyya, but I also accompanied him to many a society affair, and danced enough to last me a lifetime."

"Don't swear off."

"I don't. I merely claim that this life suits me very well."

"Evidently you have carried away with you into 'the wilderness' no pleasant recollections."

"Probably. I only remember—but that is another thing."

"I do not understand this."

"Memory, is a store-house, in which, like in a safe, the past is deposited, while reminiscences appear only at rare intervals, when you enter that storehouse to take something."

Having finished her little explanation, Marinya was surprised at the boldness with which she tackled philosophical discussion about the difference between memory and reminiscences, and blushed perceptibly.

Polanetzki, in the meantime, not the less astonished, thought:

"Beautiful and clever . . ." then he added aloud, "This definition had never entered my mind. It is very apt indeed."

And he gazed at her with eyes full of sympathy. She was, indeed, beautiful. Smiling, and somewhat confused by his praise, she looked a picture of happy youth. But she blushed still more when Polonetzki added: "Tomorrow, before my departure, I will ask you for some room. . . . if even in your storehouse."

He said it in such a spirit that no offensive construction could be given his words, and Marinya, not without some coquetry replied: "Granted, but it must be a mutual arrangement. . . ."

"In such event I shall have to visit very often my storehouse, and I prefer to take up my residence there altogether."

These words seemed to the young girl too bold for an acquaintance of such recent date. But before she could compose her thoughts for an answer, Plavitzki interfered.

"I like Polanetzki!" exclaimed he, "and prefer him to Goutovski, who sits silent, like a clam."

"Because I only speak of matters of importance, and things I can master," sadly answered the young man.

"Polanetzki smiled. Marinya seemed to pity Gou-

tovski, for she suddenly turned the conversation to the discussion of "things he could master."

"She is either a coquette or a girl with an angelic nature," thought Polanetzki.

The awkward pause was broken by Plavitzki, who, passing from one subject to another with lightning rapidity, asked Polanetzki:

"Do you know Bukatzki?"

"Naturally. He is a nearer relation to me than yourself."

"Our relations number legions, and are scattered the whole world over. Bukatzki was Marinya's most devoted dancing partner: he was at her side on almost all such occasions."

Polanetzki laughed again:

"And as a reward, he was sent to her store-house, to wallow in dust. But Bukatzki fears no dust. He is the most elegantly-dressed man in Warsaw. Just like you, uncle. And what is occupying his great mind? He analyzes the pure fresh air. In fact he is analyzing everything and everybody. Nothing escapes his scrutinizing observations. He is an original, whose head is divided and subdivided into various cells and closets. These closets are filled to suffocation with observations and minute studies of things no one else would take the slightest interest in. Once, on his return from Venice, I met Bukatzki and questioned him about the wonders he had seen in Italy. This was his curious reply: 'On the Riva dei Schiavoni (a river near Venice) I saw one fine morning half of an egg shell, and half of a lemon rind floating side by side. They came together, were driven apart; tossed by the waves, again approached each other, when, suddenly the dried half of a lemon jumped into the half shell of the egg, and floated down the river, carried by the swift current. That is harmony.' You see, such problems fill the brain of Bukatzki, though he knows quite considerable . . . about fine arts, for instance."

"They say he is a very able chap."

"May be, but his abilities have never been utilized. He is eating bread, and doing little else. Had he been a man of gay disposition, but he is positively a melancholic.

I forgot to mention that at present he is in love with Emilya Chavastovska."

"Is Emilya visited by many?"

"Hardly. I visit her, and Vaskovski, Bukatzki, and Mashko, the lawyer, who is always buying and selling estates are her only visitors."

"She probably is not in a position to keep open house, as her whole life is devoted to the nursing of her Lida."

"Poor child!" said Polanetzki. "Let us hope that Reichenhall will be beneficial to her." And the beaming face of Polanetzki became clouded with sincere grief. Now it was Marinya's turn to look at him with sympathetic eyes, and for the second time she thought:

"He must, indeed, be a very kind man!"

In the meantime Plavitzki communed with himself: "Mashko—Mashko!" he murmured, "it must be the same that courted Marinya, but she had no love for him. As to estates, their prices have fallen so low, may God have mercy on us!"

At last dinner was over and coffee was served in the main reception-room. Plavitzki flavored his coffee with jokes at Goutovski's expense, an occupation he loved to follow when in particularly good humor. The young man bore his slights patiently, but with such an expression on his immobile face, which seemed to say: "Thank your lucky stars that you are the father of Marinya, or not a bone in your body would I leave unbroken."

After coffee, Marinya took her seat at the antiquated piano, while her father busied himself with his cards. Marinya did not play very well, but her serene quiet face, fixed intently on the notes, as if inspired with their stirring lines, attracted Polanetzki more than anything else. About five o'clock Plavitzki looked at his watch and remarked:

"The Yamishes are not coming."

"They will be here soon," replied Marinya.

But from that instant he kept up an incessant vigil over his watch, as if counting the minutes, the seconds, and repeating the news, that the Yamishes were not coming. Finally, about six o'clock he said in a sepulchral voice: "Something must have happened!"

Polanetzki stood at the side of Marinya, wrapped in his own thoughts, when she whispered to him: "There, we are in trouble again! I am almost sure nothing serious has happened to them, yet papa will torture himself and others the whole evening."

"Why not send some one to investigate. It is not a great distance from here, if I remember well."

"Shall I send some one to the Yamishes', papa?"

"Never mind, dear, I am going myself," replied Plavitzki, and rang the bell. A servant entered to whom he gave his orders. Then he halted, pondered a few moments, wrinkling his brow, and finally said: "It may happen that some one might call and find only my daughter . . . this is not a city. Besides, you are relations . . . You, Goutovski, may be of use to me, will you kindly come along?"

Goutovski's face plainly showed his dissatisfaction. He passed his hand over his head, and said: "At the pond there is a boat which the gardener cannot push into the water, and I promised Marinya to do it last Sunday, but she forbade me. The weather was miserable, rain was pouring in torrents."

"The pond is not more than thirty yards away from the house. Go, move the boat and return immediately."

Goutovski left the house and went into the garden. In the meantime Plavitzki paying no attention to either Marinya or Polonetzki, paced the room to and fro, repeating: "It must be neuralgia, nothing less. In case of necessity Goutovski may go for the doctor. That 'minister without an office' has surely neglected to send for one."

And, apparently, longing to make some one the target of his wrath, he turned to Polanetzki, and added: "You cannot imagine what an abominable fool he is!"

"Who?"

"Yamish!"

"But, Papa . . . began Marinya."

Her father, however growing more and more excited, and interrupting Marinya, continued: "I know that you do not like her way of proving her sympathy and friendship for me. But to this I have but one reply: You may read all you want, the deep philosophical treatise of Pan

Yamish her husband on matters pertaining to the management of farms, but allow me to have my sympathies."

At that moment Polanetzki had the best opportunity to convince himself of the extreme kindness of Marinya, who instead of growing indignant, ran toward her father, embraced and kissed him. "In a moment, Papa dear, the horse will be ready immediately. Do you wish me to go with you? I will if you do, but do not lose your good humor it does you no good."

Plavitzki, who sincerely loved his daughter, kissed her forehead and said: "I know you possess a golden heart, but what is Goutovski doing there so long?"

He went to the open door, calling the young man, who soon returned, utterly exhausted, and said: "the boat, which is full of water, is too far from the pond, and I could not move it."

"Take your hat, then, and come—the carriage is at the front."

A moment later Polanetzki and Marinya were left alone.

"Papa is accustomed to a more refined society than one meets in the village," said Marinya after a short pause, "and that is why he is so fond of Panni Yamish; but Pan Yamish her husband is also very kind and thoughtful."

"I saw him in church this forenoon. He seemed to me terrified, and beaten into submission and silence by some superior force."

"He really is a sick man, a man who labored more than was good for him."

"Like yourself?"

"Oh, no. Pan Yamish splendidly manages his estates, and finds time to contribute to farming magazines. He is truly the pride of our country, and such a scrupulous honest man! She is also a very good woman, but a little too elegant for me."

"An ex-beauty, with pretensions."

"Yes. These pretensions are intensified by her constant life in the village, where she is actually rusting. It seems that in large cities such eccentricities and comical features in the characters of men and women disappear, are lost sight of, in the jostling of crowds; but, in a village

such people more easily become originals, cranks, if you prefer it. Little by little, such types lose all attractions for society, they cling to some antiquated ultra-conventional mode of treating people, and, finally, become prudish. However, I think, that we all must seem to you comical and rusty in our village swamps."

"On the contrary, not all. For instance—you."

"My turn will come," said the young girl, laughing.

"Yes, time changes everything!"

"We change very little here, and whenever we do, it is for the worse."

"But in the eventful lives of young girls, changes are always expected."

"First of all we must establish some sort of order in Kremen—my father."

"It seems that Kremen and your father—these are the two goals of your life."

"Yes. But I can help neither. I know so little."

"Father, Kremen, and nothing more," repeated Polanetzki.

A pause ensued, which Marinya finally broke by asking Polanetzki whether he cared to go out into the garden. They went out, and soon found themselves on the bank of the pond. Polanetzki who belonged, when abroad, to a number of athletic clubs, pushed the boat (which Goutovski could not move), into the water, without much difficulty. But it was found to be leaking and useless.

"There you have the first example of my managing the estate," said Marinya laughing. In everything and everywhere, water is coming through, and I don't know how to justify myself, for the garden and the pond are both my territory. However, I must see that the boat is repaired."

"Is this not the same row-boat, in which I was forbidden to take a sail, when a lad?"

"Very possibly. Have you ever noticed that unanimated things live longer and change less than men? It is a very sad thought."

"Let us hope that we shall live longer than this old row-boat, all moss-covered and water-soaked like a sponge. But if it is the same old boat, I must admit that I am any-

thing but lucky in regard to it. Years ago I was forbidden to use it, and now I have lacerated my hand on one of its rusty nails."

Polanetzki took out a handkerchief from his pocket and with his left hand began to bandage the wounded finger, but it was being done so clumsily, that Marinya, at the sight of it, said:

"I don't think you can do it yourself. Let me help you."

And she began to bandage his hand which he purposely turned around time and again to hinder her work, and also because he was thrilled by the tender touch of her fingers. She noticed that he purposely made her task more difficult, and glanced at him stealthily. But their eyes met. She understood why he did it, blushed crimson, and bent down as if to pay more attention to her work. Polanetzki felt the proximity of her body, breathing a fascinating warmth, and his heart began to beat quicker and faster."

"I have had very pleasant recollections of my old-time vacations spent here," said he to break the awkward pause, "but now I shall carry away with me still better ones. You are so kind, and like a rare flower that was planted and forgotten in this Kremen. Indeed, I don't exaggerate."

Marinya understood that Polanetzki spoke earnestly, sincerely, though perhaps boldly, which was due more to his temper, than to the fact that they were left alone. She was not insulted, but jokingly reproached him with her soft musical voice:

"Please," said she, "cease your flattering, for I will either make a botch of the bandaging, or run away."

"Tie the finger up the best you can, but pray, do not leave me. The evening is so lovely."

Marinya finished her work, and they walked on in silence. The evening was really a wonderful one. The sun was setting. The pond, undisturbed, unruffled by the slightest breeze, looked now like a mass of gold, then like a mass of fire. Beyond the pond the old oak-trees monotonously swayed their green heads. Amongst them, now singly, now in a chorus, the numerous birds chirruped their evening songs.

"Kremen is beautiful, very beautiful!" repeated Polanetzki.

"Yes, very!" sadly echoed Marinya.

"I understand your attachment, your love for the place, into which you put so much labor. I can also perceive now, how one can have, even in such a wilderness, moments of rare pleasure and enjoyment. Take us now, for instance. How lovely it is here! In the city one often wearies of life, especially those who, like myself, are always over ears in various business transactions. My partner Bigel has a wife, children, and life to him is made pleasant. But I? More than once I said to myself: I work and work, day in and day out, but for whose particular benefit? Of course, I will have acquired money, but of what good is that? To-morrow will be little better than to-day, work, work and work! But, you see, once a man devotes his energies to money-hoarding, it seems to him the only real goal of life worth living for. And yet, there are moments, when my old eccentric Vaskovski is positively right in his assertions that those whose names end in "tzki" or "vich," can never put into anything their whole soul, can never be satisfied with that one thing. He claims that in our minds the memory of olden times is fresh and green, that we Slavs have other missions than the hoarding of money. He is a very original type, a philosopher and a mystic. I argue with him, and continue acquiring money at the same time the best I can, but now, alone with you, in this charming spot, I must confess that there is some sense in his philosophy."

For a moment both were silent. At last, Polanetzki resumed:

"Panni Chavastovska told me the truth. That one can make your acquaintance, learn to like you, and confide in you more in one hour than with other people during a month. I am convinced of it myself now, for it seems to me that I have known you so long a time. I believe that such impressions are produced only by extremely kind, generous people."

"Emilya is very fond of me and is very generous in her praises," replied the young girl, "and had it been true, it seems to me that much depends on the other person,

you know. I certainly could not be the same with everybody."

"Indeed not! Last night, for instance, the impression was entirely different; but then you were tired and sleepy."

"Yes, partly so."

"And why did you not retire? Could not the servant have prepared tea for me; and, at least could I not go to bed without it?"

"Oh, no! We are not so deficient in hospitality. Papa declared that one of us had to accord you a cordial reception, and I was afraid he might undertake the task himself. I took his place."

"I beg your pardon, then," said Polanetzki, "that I spoke of our financial affairs as soon as I put my foot in your dining-room. This is the manner of a tradesman, I suppose, to speak of money first and last. I reproached myself afterwards for my undue haste, and now shamefacedly beg your forgiveness."

"You need not apologize, for you are not to blame. You were told that the management of the estate was in my hands, and naturally, you turned to me."

The glowing sun disappeared beyond the green mountains, and, little by little, darkness and night came down upon the peaceful village. After a short while they returned to the house, but the evening being so beautiful, they sat down on the veranda facing the garden. Polanetzki suddenly arose, and without a word of explanation, went into the house. He returned immediately carrying a low stool, and kneeling down, he put it under the feet of Marinya.

"Thank you! Thank you very much!" she repeated blushing, adjusting her dress. "How kind you are!"

"I am not very attentive by nature," replied he, "but do you know who taught me these little duties? Lida. She must be well taken care of, and Panni Chavastovska must remember every little thing which might comfort the little sufferer."

"She remembers it well, besides we shall all help her. Had she not gone to Reichenhall, I would have invited her to Kremen."

"I would have followed Lida without your invitation."

"You may consider yourself invited in the name of my father to visit us whenever you choose."

"Do not be so magnanimous, lest I should take advantage of your kindness and abuse it. I feel very good here, and as soon as I weary of Warsaw I will escape to Kremen to hide under your protection."

Polanetzki was now conscious that his words were aimed to establish between them certain friendly relations, to burden each other with their mutual sympathies, likes and dislikes. Yet he spoke purposely as well as sincerely, and while his words brought the color to her cheeks, he gazed at her young, tender face, lighted by the setting sun, so serene, so quiet. Marinya raised her blue eyes, in which he could plainly read the question: "Is this idle talk, or what?"

"Very well!" she murmured half audibly. And again both kept silence, feeling that something was taking place within their souls.

"I am surprised that papa has not come yet," suddenly said Marinya.

In fact, the sun had long set; a damp moisture was felt in the air, and the pond was alive with frogs.

But Polanetzki did not reply to her remark, and as if sunk in his own meditations, began: "I do not attempt to analyze life, having no time for it, but when I am comfortable, when I am happy—as I am now,—I feel it with all my senses. When I am miserable—I feel it in the same manner. But five or six years ago it was different. There was a number of us young people who gathered on short summer evenings and long winter nights to discuss various problems of life. There were some savants, and a writer very popular in Belgium. We stormed each other with questions; whither we were going, what will be the result, the ultimate end. We read the theories of pessimists, and were entangled and lost in the meshes of their knotty problems. We were not unlike the birds that cross the seas in their flights and have nothing on which to alight and rest. But out of all that chaotic mass of dogmas that filled my brain I retained two things: first, that those popular Belgians and others savants and writers,

take it less to their hearts than we do. We are more simple, more naïve. Second, that every new attack of pessimism makes me weak, robs me of my appetite for labor. Then I sobered up and devoted my time and energies to the prosaic occupation of printing calico. I said to myself that life was the right of nature,—sensible or not, it matters little. One must live and draw from life whatever she yields, whatever he can. And I am going to get my share of it. True, Vaskovzki claims that we Slavs cannot stop at one thing, but this is mere philosophy. There are two things besides money-making—rest, serenity and—do you know what else? A woman! Yes, a woman! For a man needs some one to share his joys and sorrows. Death may come afterward—but very well. Let it come; for where death steps in, the human mind, that instrument of self-torture, takes its departure. ‘That’s not my business,’ as the Englishman says. In the meantime one must have somebody to whom to give his possessions—money, knowledge, fame. The moon may be full of precious stones, but they are worthless, because there is no one to appreciate their value. A man must have some one to understand him, to appreciate his qualities. But who can understand me better than a woman; a woman, kind and confiding, a woman I love with every nerve of my soul? This is the goal of every man’s life; for does it not bring rest, contentment, the only thing that is sensible? I speak not as a poet, or as a dreamer, but as a positivist and a merchant. To have at your side a beloved creature,—this a sacred goal,—and then let come what may. This is my philosophy.”

Polanetzki declared that he spoke like a merchant, but his words were those of a lover, affected by the fascinations of a July evening, and the presence of a young girl, who from many points of view came up to his requirements and ideas of life. Polanetzki was aware of it, and to lessen its effect, turned directly to Marinya.

“Those are my thoughts, which I seldom lay before the world. But to-day I decided to air them before you; probably, thanks to Panni Chavastovska, who I must repeat, has spoken the truth: one can become nearer to you in one day, than with others in a year. I shall never

regret my visit to Kremen, and hope to repeat it as often as you will permit me."

"Do come often."

"Thank you!"

And he held out his hand. Marinya gave him hers, as if to signify consent.

Again silence reigned for some time, both being busy with their own thoughts. At last Marinya, pointing with her hand to the light that increased every moment beyond the alder trees, remarked: "the moon!"

"Oh! The moon, indeed!"

Slowly the red disk of the moon appeared on the starry sky from under the alder trees. At the same time the dogs began to bark, the clatter of horses' hoofs was heard, and a moment later, Plavitzki appeared on the threshold of the hall, lighted by a lamp. Marinya, followed by Polanetzki, entered the house.

"Nothing happened," said the old man. "Panni Chrometzka paid them a visit. Thinking that she might take her leave soon, the Yamishes failed to let us know. Pan Yamish is somewhat indisposed, but intends going to Warsaw to-morrow. She will be here day after to-morrow."

"Which means all's well?" asked Marinya.

"Naturally. But what have you been doing here?"

"We listened to the frogs," replied Polanetzki; "and we feel very good, I assure you."

"God alone knows why He created frogs, and though they disturb my slumbers, I do not complain. There is some good in them after all. Let us have tea, Marinya."

Tea was prepared in the adjoining room. Plavitzki told of his visit to Panni Yamish. The young people were silent, but from time to time gazed at each other with their clear eyes, and when the hour struck eleven they both departed with the recollection of a handshake that spoke of mutual friendship. Marinya felt very tired, unusually so for Sunday, but it was a pleasant fatigue. Then when she laid her little head on the soft pillows she thought no more of the fact that to-morrow was Monday—a work-day, full of petty cares and worries. Her thoughts were centered on Polanetzki, and in her ears rang his words: "And who will understand me, who will

appreciate me better than a woman ; a woman, kind and confiding, a woman I could love with every nerve of my soul."

In the meantime Polanetzki, undressing and lighting a cigarette, dreamed aloud : " A very good, a very beautiful girl. The world has not her equal."

CHAPTER III.

THE next day was gray and misty, the skies covered with huge, threatening clouds. A storm was in the air. Marinya awoke early, indisposed and conscience-stricken. It seemed to her that she had allowed herself to be carried away too far by some unknown current, that she had simply flirted with Polanetzki. Her self-rebuke was the more vigorous and merciless the more she reflected that he came to Kremen not as a mere visitor, but as a stern creditor. Last night it escaped her memory, but to-day she thought, "he will certainly accept my conduct as a ruse to gain his friendship, to soften him." At this thought the blood rushed to her face and temples. Such was her nature, scrupulous and ambitious, that she grew indignant at the very idea of her being accused of mercenary motives. And yet she knew only too well that the safe of Kremen was empty, that by the sale of Magyerovka it was hoped to realize some snug sum in the future, there were other creditors to whom her father would fain give preference. It is true she resolved to do her utmost to have Polanetzki's claim satisfied before others, but she was also aware that her influence counted but little. Plavitski willingly transferred the management of the estate to his active daughter, but in financial matters he brooked no interference and would turn a deaf ear to all arguments. His idea seemed to be to gain temporary relief; to promise worlds and do nothing; to offer hopes and visions of forthcoming riches as something substantial in payment of notes long overdue. Somehow he managed to cling to Kremen, and though, at the end, the crash was inevitable, the old man loved to be regarded as the "head of all transactions," considering all contradictions as doubts of his business abilities. Marinya was frequently exposed to unnecessary humiliations. Her life in the village was a perfect chain of worries, ungrateful

labor, and self-torture, which only her tranquil, placid face could conceal, although it betrayed an extraordinary strength and flexibility of character. But the humiliation which was in store for her at that moment exceeded all others in her uneventful past. "If only he did not condemn me," she repeated to herself time and again. But what could she do? Her first idea was to invite Polanetzki to an informal chat, and make some arrangement before he had seen her father, to make clear to him their condition in a frank, open manner, which one employs with a man worthy of confidence. But this thought soon gave place to another: such a discussion of grave financial matters could only be construed as a plea for mercy, and therefore savored of humiliation. Had Marinya, like a woman who feels the throbbing of her heart, been conscious, half instinctively, of the fact, that between her and the young man, only recently a perfect stranger to her, relations were being developed which predicted a serious finale, she would have undoubtedly chosen that path. But now it seemed to her impossible. There remained but one choice, to see Polanetzki, to impress upon him by her present conduct the fickleness of women in general, and her own especially; in short, to destroy the threads of sympathy they were yesterday weaving together, and to accord him full liberty of action. This means she imagined to be the most convenient. Learning from the servant that Polanetzki had not only risen, but, having drunk his tea, had gone out for a walk, she decided to meet him. In this she succeeded very easily. A few moments later he was seen returning from a short promenade through the garden. Halting before the back porch, which was covered with a net of grapevines, he spoke to the dogs that welcomed him on the night of his arrival. At first he did not notice Marinya standing on the porch in a waiting attitude. He patted the dogs as they romped around him, throwing themselves at his feet, crawling up his knees. At length, discovering Marinya, he rushed to her with astonishing alertness and halted before her, visibly delighted and beaming with pleasure.

"Good-morning!" said he, "I was enjoying a quiet chat here with your dogs. Have you slept well?"

"Quite well, thank you."

And she coldly gave him her hand. He stared at her with eyes that spoke clearly of the pleasure it afforded him to meet her. And poor heart-worn Marinya fully shared his delight, and her little heart was rent with pain at the thought that she was compelled to respond coldly and ceremoniously to his cordial greeting.

"Maybe you are on your way to the various outbuildings, where your functions of management demand your presence. In such case allow me to accompany you. To-day I must turn my face homeward, and I will therefore gladly take advantage of every moment in your company. God knows, that were I in a position to do so, I would prolong my visit considerably. However, the road to Kremen is now familiar to me."

Suddenly Polanetzki noticed the cold ring of her words, the unnatural frigidity of her face. He gazed at her in utter astonishment. If Marinya thought that he would at once adapt himself to her erratic disposition, she was sadly mistaken. He was too energetic, too bold, not to demand the reason for the sudden change.

"What is the matter?" said he, looking straight into her clear eyes.

"Nothing, I assure you," said she, somewhat confused.

"No; I am not mistaken, and, what's more, you know it very well yourself. You appear to me to-day the same as you were on our first meeting. But then the fault was mine. I spoke of money, when it was hardly in place or in time. Yesterday I obtained your forgiveness, and our conversation was so friendly, so interesting. . . . But suddenly you change again. . . . Won't you be kind enough to explain?"

No diplomacy, not even the best of its kind, could work more havoc with her plans than those simple words. She hoped and feared to put a damper on his enthusiasm, to drive him away, yet he braved all barriers, and stood nearer to her at that moment than ever before.

"Tell me, frankly, what is the matter with you," he pleaded with the tone of a man who is being insulted. "Your father told me yesterday that I was to be his guest during that day, and to-day I may become your creditor

again. . . . that is mere talk. I have no conception of such differences, and shall never be your creditor, but rather your debtor. . . . I owe you very much, as it is, for your extreme kindness of yesterday, and God knows that I would give much to remain your debtor forever. . . ."

And again he looked at her as if waiting for the reappearance of that fascinating smile on her pink lips. But Marinya, whose heart was distressed more and more, followed her chosen path: first, because it was her own choice; and, secondly, because of the fear of provoking further discussions.

"I assure you," she finally said, mastering her emotions, "that you were either mistaken yesterday, or you labor under a lamentable illusion to-day. I am always the same, and I shall be perfectly happy to know that you left us with pleasant recollections of the brief visit."

These words were pronounced very politely, but they were from the lips of a young girl so unlike the one he admired the day before, that Polanetzki's mobile face began to show signs of impatience, and even anger.

"If you wish me," he said, "to make believe that I place credence in your explanation, I will submit. I will depart with the impression that, in this part of the country, Monday is no relative of Sunday, and does not resemble it a bit."

Marinya was touched to the quick by the biting sarcasm of his last words, they seemed to make a claim to certain rights, created by her conduct of yesterday. Her answer had more the ring of sadness about it than of anger:

"What would you do?"

A moment later she was gone, after declaring to Polanetzki that she must greet her father. He remained alone, kicked the dogs that tried to attract his attention, and plunged into the ungrateful occupation of losing his temper.

"What does this mean?" he asked himself repeatedly. Yesterday all smiles, to-day cold and indifferent! A different woman entirely. And how foolish it is, how small! Yesterday a relative, to-day—a creditor. What is this to her? Have I robbed anybody? Did she not know yes-

terday why I came here? Very well, pretty Panna. If you wish me to be your creditor and not Pan Polanetzki, you shall have your way,—the devil take you one and all!”

In the meantime Marinya entered the room of her father, who was sitting in his morning-robe at the table, which was covered with papers. He turned for a moment to respond to the greeting of his daughter, then busied himself again with the perusal of the papers.

“Papa,” said Marinya, “I came to speak about Polanetzki. You, papa——”

But he interrupted her, and not taking his eyes from the papers, said:

“Your Polanetzki will be in my hands like a lump of wax.”

“I doubt very much, whether you will be able to come to terms with him. I only wished to say, that we ought to satisfy him before others, even if it is against our own interests.”

Plavitzki turned around, looked at her, and asked coldly: “That’s it. Eh? But what does it mean, pray, a self-instituted guardianship over him or over me?”

“This is a question of your honor, father.”

“Do you really believe that I am in need of your advice in such matters?”

“No, papa, but——”

“What a pathetic day this seems to be! What does it all mean?”

“I only implore, my father.”

“And I request you to leave it all to me. You have taken the reins of the management out of my hands, and I willingly gave them to you, because I have no desire to quarrel with my only child in the last days of my life. But let me have this corner in the entire house; let me have one little room and the liberty to arrange such matters.”

“But papa, dearest papa,—I only beg——”

“That I should move to the hamlet. What barn, then, will you have me call my own?”

Plavitzki who spoke of a pathetic day, evidently was loath to let anyone share with him that monopoly. He

arose, like King Lear, and grasped the back of the chair as if for support, thus giving a hint to his cruel daughter that, struck by her cruelties, he is in danger of breaking down, and falling prostrate on the carpeted floor. Tears came to the eyes of the young girl, and a bitter feeling of helplessness like a lump came in her throat and choked her. She paused for a moment, as if struggling with compassion, and an inclination to cry aloud, then she said in a low voice:

“Forgive me, father!”

And she was gone.

Fifteen minutes later, Polanetzki, at the request of the old man, went into the latter's room. Polanetzki was angry, excited, and could scarcely control himself.

Plavitzki after bidding him good-morning, pointed to a comfortable chair, and crossing his hands on his knee, began:

“I hope, Stach, that you will not burn my house, neither kill me who has opened his arms to you, nor leave my child an unprotected orphan?”

“No, uncle,” replied Polanetzki. “I feel no inclination for burning houses just now. You may keep on living in your old way. No child will be left an orphan, if I can help it. What I want is to put an end to all such introductions which can do you no good, and are to me, embarrassing at the least.”

“Very well,” said Plavitzki, chagrined that his style of expression was not appreciated by his nephew. “But remember that you came to me, and to the house you visited as a child.”

“I came here, because such was the will of my mother. My mother came here because you did not pay the interest on your mortgage. But all this is neither here nor there. That mortgage is now twenty-one years old, and together with the interest represents the sum of twenty-four thousand roubles. For simplicity's sake let us name it twenty thousand, it being a round, even amount. But these twenty thousand roubles I must get, and this is why I came here.”

Plavitzki convincingly nodded his head.

“And that is why you came here,” repeated he with ill-

concealed scorn. "But tell me, Stach, why were you yesterday quite another man?"

Polanetzki, who half an hour ago put the same question to Marinya, nervously jumped in his chair, but instantly restrained himself, and remarked:

"Let us talk business, please!"

"I am not opposed to it, but permit me first, to say a few words. Don't interrupt me. You said that I did not pay the interest. True. But do you know why? Your mother had not given me her whole fortune, which would require the consent of the executors of your father's will. Perhaps this was detrimental to your own benefit. But this is not the point I want to reach. Having taken from her the paltry few thousands, I decided thus: Here is a woman, a widow left alone in the world with her child, and God alone knew how she would fare in the days to come. The money, said I to myself, must remain with me and serve, so to say, as a solid foundation for her future. Let the interest grow and multiply until there is enough for her to depend upon for support in later years. From that moment I was your savings bank. Your mother gave twelve thousand roubles. I have now some twenty-four thousand. Such is the brilliant result. Will you now pay me with ingratitude?"

"Listen, dear uncle!" said Polanetzki, losing patience. "Please do not consider me more stupid than I really am. Do not think me demented. I warn you that you cannot catch me in this trap. The bait is altogether too poor. You say you have twenty-four thousand roubles of my money—out with them! I beg of you to hand them over to me without further argument."

"And I ask you to be more patient, more lenient, if only because I am your senior," said Plavitzki with dignity.

"I have a partner, who, a month from now, will invest in a certain enterprise twelve thousand roubles. I must produce an equal amount, of course. I therefore declare to you, most explicitly, that after two years' constant bombarding with letters, I cannot, I will not wait any longer."

Plavitzki put his elbow on the table, closed his eyes, and was silent.

Polanetzki looked at him, waiting for an answer, gazed at him with increasing disgust, and repeatedly put to himself the question: "What is he—a fraud, a scoundrel, or an egotist grown so blind in self-admiration that he measures good and evil with his own yard-stick for his own benefit,—or all three together?"

Plavitzki continued to be silent, covering his face with the palm of his hand.

"At last I wish to know something," resumed Polanetzki.

But Planitzki made a sign with his hand that he was not through with his calculations.

Suddenly he showed a beaming face.

"Do you know, Stach, what I have to say? Why quarrel when there is such an easy solution at hand?"

"What is it?"

"Take the 'mergel' (a chalky clay)."

"What?"

"Come here with your partner, and an expert. Let us put a conservative price on the deposit of 'mergel' and organize a company. Your partner, what's his name, Bigel?—will pay me according to his share of the stock, and we will work hand in hand, to our mutual benefit, for there is a real treasure in it, I assure you."

Polanetzki arose.

"Pardon me," said he, "I am not accustomed to being laughed at like a fool. I do not want your 'treasures.' I want money, and all your plans and schemes I consider shameless, senseless efforts to dodge the real issue." A moment of awkward silence ensued. A Jupiter-like anger began to cloud the brow and forehead of Plavitzki. His eyes shot lightning glances at the bold intruder. He rose majestically, and walking a few steps toward the opposite wall, he selected a quaint hunter's dagger and handing it to Polanetzki said:

"In such case there remains only one other alternative. Here is my breast—slay!"

And he unbuttoned his robe. But Polanetzki, overcome by a mingled feeling of indignation and disgust, pushed away his hand holding the dagger, and in a loud, excited voice exclaimed: "This is a base comedy—and

nothing more ! It's absolutely a waste of time and words to argue with you any longer. I am going away, because your Kremen is quite sufficient for me, but I warn you that I will sell my claim for half its original value, to the first Jew I meet, who will take you in hand better than I can."

At these words Plavitzki held out his right hand, and pointing to the door, solemnly pronounced :

"Go and sell! Let a Jew into the sacred portals of your native nest! But remember that my curse and the curses of all who lived here before me, will follow you to the end of the world."

Polanetzki ran out of the room, pale and white with rage. He ran into the reception-room, and while hunting blindly for his hat, delivered himself of a torrent of curses that was more than sufficient for Plavitzki's ancestors, numerous as they might have been. At last he found his hat, and as he rushed toward the door to see whether his carriage was awaiting him, he almost ran into the arms of Marinya. At the sight of her he halted, but remembering that she was manager *de facto* of Kremen's destinies, said in tremulous voice :

"Farewell! I am done with your father. I came to collect my property, but first of all he blessed me, then he offered me imaginary treasures, and finally he lavishly supplied me with curses enough to last for two lives. A nice way to pay debts!"

There was an instant during this tirade, when Marinya wanted to offer him her hand and say : "I can understand your anger. A few minutes before your entrance into father's room I was there myself. I begged him to settle with you before all others. Do with us and with Kremen whatever you please, but do not condemn me. Don't think that I am in the conspiracy to rob you of your own, and respect me, if only a little." And she stretched out her hand, and the words were hanging on her lips, but Polanetzki, getting excited more and more, and again losing his self-control, added with vehemence :

"I relate to you these facts, because when on the first night I mentioned the matter you felt offended, and referred me to your father. I thank you for your valuable

advice, but as it proved to be of more benefit for yourself than for me, I will next time choose my own mode of action."

The pink lips of Marinya became white, tears of indignation and insulted dignity swelled in her blue eyes, and proudly lifting her head said:

"You may heap insults upon me to your heart's content, since there is no one to protect me."

And she turned her back to him, and went toward the door, filled with a bitter feeling of humiliation and despair in that incessant labor, into which she put her strength, the fire of her young, pure soul, and for which she reaped such bitter fruit. Polanetzki discovered only too late, that, carried away by excitement, he had committed an irreparable wrong. In a moment anger gave place to pity. He was eager to run after her, to crave her pardon, but it was too late: Marinya was gone.

This was the last straw. Rage literally boiled within him. Still he overcame both his rage and his remorse, and bidding farewell to no one, he jumped into the waiting carriage, which carried him swiftly away from Kremen. For a long time the master-thought that filled his brain was revenge. "I will certainly sell it for a third of its price," repeated he excitedly, "and let them ruin you, send you away homeless paupers! Upon my word of honor, I will sell it. I may not be compelled to do it, but I will!"

Thus his ideas took the form of a firm decision. Polanetzki was not one of those men who throw their words to the wind. The main difficulty now was to find a purchaser willing to invest such an amount, which in turn meant the sale, the ruin of Kremen.

Meanwhile the carriage passed the broad avenue and reached the road in the open field. Recovering somewhat, Polanetzki began to think of Marinya in an absolutely mosaic way: his thoughts were a variegated collection of bits of feeling of admiration for her beauty, of impressions made upon him by her face and figure, of recollections of Sunday's conversation, displeasures, compassion, imaginary insults, anger, and, finally, discontent with himself that exceeded his disappointment in Marinya. These feelings were at battle

with each other, now one, now another, gaining supremacy. There were moments when he remembered the tall, stately figure of Marinya, her dark hair, her pretty if somewhat broad lips, and lastly, the subtle expression of her face, and again the sympathy for her appeared victorious. He thought she was too pure, too womanly, that there was something in the outlines of her shoulder and her entire figure that attracted with a strange magic force. He remembered her soft, musical voice, her serene look, her apparent kindness and generosity, and he heaped curses on himself for his ungovernable temper, for his scandalous behavior at his departure.

"If her father is an old clown, a swindler and a dunce," he said to himself, "and if she understands it and feels it, the more is the pity, for she must be truly wretched and miserable. But under such circumstances, every sensible man, every man with a feeling heart, would sympathize with her, and not attack the poor child, as I did, I—."

And he was ready to strike himself, for he understood at the same time what a delightful state of intimacy, what a mutual respect there might have developed between them, had he, after his stormy scene with her father, treated her in a polite, gentlemanly way. She would have extended to him both her pretty hands, which he would have kissed most fervently, and they would have parted the best of friends. "At the end, the devil may take that money," thought he, "and now he might do some good by taking me." He felt that he had acted foolishly, at least, and this knowledge unbalanced him, pushed him farther and farther along that path he himself considered unfortunate. And he continued to meditate in approximately the following manner:

"But once it is all lost—God have mercy on them! I will sell my claim to the first Jew that comes my way. Let him press them to the wall, let him ruin them, leave them without a roof. May the old man seek employment in his old days. And Marinya apply for the position of governess, or marry Goutovski." But here he felt that he would sooner consent to anything than to see this take place. He would break Goutovski's head! "Let anybody marry her, but not that dullard, not that bear." And the unfortunate Goutovski became the target of all his pent-up

rage, just as if he were the direct cause of what had happened. Having reached Chernyov, the railroad terminus, he looked in vain for Goutovski, ready to make him the victim of his revenge. Fortunately for Goutovski, he met on the station only a few peasants and Jews, and the emaciated, though intelligent, refined face of Pan Yamish, who recognized him. When the bell rang and the train started, Yamish invited him to his own private car, which he obtained thanks to his intimate acquaintance with the station-master.

"I knew your father very well," said Yamish, as soon as they were comfortably seated, "in his best days. I was married not far from his estates. And a splendid estate it was. Your grandfather was one of the most prominent landowners in that region; but now, I presume it has all passed into other hands."

"Oh, yes, a long time since. My father before his death lost all his estates. He was an invalid, resided for the most part at Nice, paid little attention to the management of his fortune,—and the result is obvious. If it had not been for the meager inheritance my mother received after his death, we would have fared very ill, indeed."

"But you seem to get along splendidly yourself. I happen to know your firm. I have had some business with it through Pan Abdulski concerning the sale of hops."

"Ah! Pan Abdulski was your representative?"

"Yes, and I must admit that your firm has given me full satisfaction in the matter. You have acquired an enviable reputation, based on honest dealings, which alone leads to success."

"Honest dealings are essential in our business, as in every other branch of commerce. My partner is a very scrupulous man. And I myself am not—Plavitzki."

"What do you mean?" asked Pan Yamish, interested.

With the rage still burning within him, with a voice ringing with just indignation, Polonetzki related to him the stormy scene just enacted at Kremen.

"H'm? muttered Yamish "Since you speak of him unceremoniously, handling him without gloves, allow me to add a few words, though he is your relative."

"Our relationship is doubtful: his first wife was a relative, a chum of my mother."

"I have known Plavitzki for a number of years. * He is a man more spoiled by surroundings than really bad by nature. He was an only son and therefore first of all, became the pet and despot of his parents, and later on of his two wives. The latter were both kind, easy-going women, who fairly worshipped him. He was their idol. For many years the circumstances were such that he was the sun round which circled all minor planets, until he finally reached the conclusion that the world owed him everything, while he owed to his fellow men—nothing. When one is brought up under such circumstances, measuring good and evil with his own yardstick for his own benefit, he has all the facilities for losing his moral equilibrium. Plavitski is a mixture of idleness and weakness; idleness, because he was always careful to evade everything that savored of labor; weakness, because he met no obstacle in his way, and these evils ultimately became deep rooted, natural, and demoralizing. Then came hard times, times which only a man with a strong character and a powerful will could tide over without breaking down, and these qualities he lacked absolutely.

"Instead of facing the trouble like a man, he began to juggle and dodge, and finally became an adept in this contemptible art. But after all, success does not always favor the dodger. It is my candid opinion that Plavitzki will eventually lose his hold upon Kremen, even though he should sell Magyerovka. Marinya alone has my heartfelt sympathies. There is a girl worthy of sincere admiration. Two years ago the old man was about to sell Kremen and establish himself in the city. It was only due to the tears and entreaties of his daughter that this plan was not carried out. The young girl, whether for the sake of the memory of her mother, or influenced by the pure love for the country and the old place so dear to her, did her utmost to prevent the sale of their old homestead. Poor girl! She imagined that one need only put his whole soul into the work, and everything would flourish and prosper. Like a true martyr she denied herself everything for the sake of Kremen. What a blow the

loss of Kremen will be for her now! I pity the girl with all my heart."

"You are very kind, indeed, Pan Yamish," exclaimed Polanetzki, forgetting his anger. The old man smiled.

"I love that little wench," he said, "and besides this frail, delicate creature has the entire management in her tender little hands. It would be a pity to lose such a gentle neighbor."

Polanetzki bit his moustache, and finally said: "Let her marry some gentleman in the vicinity. Then she may remain with you and grace the country with her charming personality."

"How easily you say it! Let her marry? A girl without a dowry is not such a tempting bait in our part of the country. And then, who is there in the vicinity to lay claim to her affections? Pan Goutovski? He would have hesitated very little to make her the mistress of his home. He is a good man, but very limited, mentally, they say. She does not seem to care enough for him—and of course that alone settles it. Goutovski's estate is very small, and if this was not sufficient reason to make the young man's chances very slim indeed, Plavitzki labors under the impression that the name of Goutovski stands much below that of his own. But one thing is certain, whoever marries Marinya acquires a treasure."

At that moment Polanetzki, carried away by his own vivid imagination of what might have been, fully shared this opinion. Once more he became absorbed in his own meditations, picturing to himself Marinya in all her fascinating charms; thinking, fearing that he would pine for her, yet consoling himself that on former occasions such pranks of the heart were easily overcome and forgotten. But the nearer he drew to Warsaw, the more restless he grew. As he alighted from the car, he muttered through his teeth: "How foolishly it all happened! How perfectly absurd!"

CHAPTER IV.

ON his return to Warsaw, Polanetzki spent the first night at the house of his partner, to whom he was attached by an old and sincere friendship. Bigel, a Pole by birth, was a descendant of an old family who, three generations before him, emigrated to Poland. Before he entered into copartnership with Polanetzki, Bigel owned a small commercial and banking establishment, which gained for him the reputation of a merchant, if not very enterprising, at least scrupulously honest in all his dealings with his clients. When Polanetzki joined Bigel the business was considerably enlarged, and acquired a wide and flattering reputation. Both partners worked in perfect harmony. Polanetzki, more active and determined, was gifted with the faculty of seeing things in their right light, and acting promptly and decisively. He it was who perceived the benefits of each new enterprise, who drew the plans of its perfection. But it was Bigel who patiently, conscientiously developed each and every detail, making the enterprise an absolute success.

If business required an energetic mind, a firm hand, a strong will, Polanetzki could not be dispensed with. If it required searching, digging, patient labor over the whys and wherefores of its possible success or failure, Bigel could not be spared. These were natures, radically opposed to each other, who met and nevertheless agreed, binding that agreement by ties of mutual friendship. Polanetzki, however, had the advantage of his partner's absolute faith in his, Polanetzki's, administrative abilities, which, crowned by a few fortunate enterprises, seemed to Bigel much greater than they really were. The golden dream of both was, after reaching a certain stage of prosperity, to open an extensive plant for the printing of calico, for which Polanetzki was especially adapted as a chemist, and Bigel as a manager. This dream, however,

was very far from becoming a fact. Less patient and more passionate, Polanetzki, on his return to his native country from abroad, made various and futile efforts to interest in the proposed scheme local capital lying idle in the hands of his wealthy relatives. He was met everywhere by cold indifference or open distrust. Among others he noticed a peculiar fact: His own name, made illustrious by his wealthy ancestors, opened the doors of higher society to him, and yet this very name did him more harm than good. It seemed as if the people he appealed to, could not in their own brain digest the thought of how a man of such a family and name that ended in "tzki," could manage any business at all. At first this fact angered Polanetzki, in view of which the more phlegmatic Bigel was compelled to check his partner's wrath by various logical arguments, which all carried the point home to Polanetzki that such lack of confidence was very natural thanks to the bitter experience of that time, a time of many beginnings and disastrous endings.

"The time has not come yet," argued Bigel. But it will come soon, or rather it is due already. Until then amateurism and dilettanteism ruled the day, but now there appear on the scene here and there trained specialists, men expert in their vocations and professions, who know what they want and how to get it. Polanetzki, himself, notwithstanding his passionate temperament, possessed a mind at once clearly developed and observing. He made many useful discoveries in those spheres which were accessible to him. These discoveries gained general approval, but this approval seemed to be underlined with a vague sort of condescension. Each and every one gave himself the trouble to admit that he agreed with Polanetzki, that he found his labor useful and expedient, but no one made an effort to conceal the fact that he was puzzled by the attitude of Polanetzki, who seemed to consider his profession natural and common.

"They all look as if they were sorry for me, or if they were doing me favors," said Polanetzki, and in this presumption he was right. He finally became convinced that had he offered his hand and name to a young lady of that higher circle, his banking and commercial firm would only

not make his road smooth, but would absolutely prove a handicap. Had he an estate burdened with debts, or a natural inclination to live the life of an idler, his suit would be looked upon with more favor. The day Polanetzki made these discoveries, he began to systematically avoid society, and finally scratched his numerous friends off his list, leaving the family of Panni Chavastovska, Bigel and such bachelor friends, without which his life would be too desolate and monotonous. He dined, like other fashionables, at Francois' with Bukatzki, old Vasovski and Mashko, the lawyer, with whom he constantly discussed the various topics of the day. But generally he led a very quiet uneventful life, void of excitements and dissipations, and, notwithstanding his increasing wealth, was still unmarried, though wistfully longing for a happy union. Having arrived at Bigel's, Polanetzki did not fail to paint Plavitzki in the darkest colors he possibly could, hoping to find sympathetic hearers in his friend and the latter's wife. But Bigel seemed totally unaffected by this pathetic tale of woe, and to his passionate tirade rejoined.

"I am familiar with such types. But, to be candid, where in the name of sense will Plavitzki get the money, if it is nowhere to be had? One must have plenty of patience with such debtors. Country estates absorb, then swallow large sums of money, but return it very rarely, and only after much hard squeezing."

"Listen, Bigel," impatiently interrupted Polanetzki. "Since you have come into the habit of taking after-dinner naps, one must have the patience of a slave to talk to you."

"My assertion is true, nevertheless. Besides, I fail to see why you are so clamoring for money? Have you not at your disposal the sum I am supposed to invest as my share of the partnership capital?"

"But what is this to you or to Plavitzki? He has had my money long enough, and he must return it."

The entrance of Panni Bigel with her children put an end to their dispute. Panni Bigel was a young woman, dark-haired, and blue-eyed, extremely kind and devoted to her six children, of whom Polanetzki himself was very

fond. She was his sincere, intimate friend, rivaling in that Panni Emilya Chavastovska. Both ladies, knowing Marinya for a number of years, determined to bring Polanetzki to her feet, and it was their scheme to send Polanetzki to Kremen. Panni Bigel was consumed with a burning curiosity to know what impression he brought home of his visit to Kremen and its fair mistress. But, owing to the noise and din of the children, conversation was impossible. The youngest, Yass, crawling on all-fours, embraced Polanetzki's knees, yelling, "Pan, Pan," the two girls Eva and Yagassia without ceremony climbed upon his knees, while Eddy and Yuzia were entertaining him with a lecture. The youngsters were reading the "Conquest of Mexico," and played war. Eddy, raising his brows, and turning up the palm of his hand spoke with exultation.

"All right, Yuzia, I'll be Cortez and, you'll be the mounted knight. But since neither little Eva nor Yagassia wish to be Montezuma, how are we going to play? We can't perform without a Montezuma. Some one must take his part, or else who will lead the Mexicans?"

"And where are the Mexicans, my brave conqueror," asked Polanetzki.

"The Mexicans and Spaniards are the chairs," replied Yuzia.

"Then I will be Montezuma, and you can go ahead conquering Mexico."

Pandemonium ensued. The quickness and liveliness of Polanetzki's movements, his love of children permitted him for the moment to become once more a child himself, and with genuine childish glee lead the campaign of defense and resistance in such a vigorous manner, that Cortez Eddy denied him finally the right of resistance, claiming, that since Montezuma was vanquished he was bound to be beaten. This was historically correct, but Montezuma would not heed to logic, but continued to fight. The fun grew more hilarious and the noise was deafening.

Panni Bigel could not wait for the battle to end, and turning to her husband, asked:

"Well, what is the result of his trip to Kremen?"

"He did there what he is doing here now," phlegmatically answered Bigel, "he turned the chairs upside down, made a lot of noise, and went home."

"Did he say anything?"

"I had no time to speak to him about Marinya, but with Plavitzki he parted in a very ugly humor. He intends to sell his debt, which will cause a positive breach of friendship and relationship."

"What a pity!" concluded his wife.

At the tea-table, after the children were put to bed, Panni Bigel took Polanetzki in hand, and plied him with her questions about Marinya.

"I am not certain," said he evasively, "she may be pretty, and still she may not: I have not thought of it."

"This is not true, I refuse to believe it," replied Panni Bigel.

"If it is not true, then, of course, it means that she is lovely, beautiful and a combination of all the virtues found among women. One can be smitten by her charms, adore her, marry her, but my foot shall never be in Kremen again. I now understand perfectly well, why you have sent me thither. But you certainly made a mistake in not warning me, what sort of a bird her father was; for, they claim, children often do resemble their parents. And if this is the case, then I surely owe you my gratitude."

"Pray, see how inconsistent you are! Think of what you said a moment ago; she is lovely, beautiful, one may marry her, and then you end with: she may resemble her father! What absurdities you do utter to-night!"

"Very possibly! but I really don't care a straw. Suffice it, that luck is apparently against me: everything goes wrong!"

"And yet I must call your attention to two facts: first, you have returned under a strong and highly favorable impression made by Marinya; second, that she is the best and purest of girls it has ever been my good fortune to know, and happy will be the man who marries her."

"Why has she not been married before?"

"Because she is barely twenty-one, and has only recently made her debut in society. But do not think for a

moment that she has no admirers and pretenders for her hand.

"Good luck to them!"

But Polanetzki's words lacked sincerity, the very thought that some one else might win her love was obnoxious to him, and yet he was grateful to Panni Bigel for her lavish praise of Marinya.

"But then," he added—"you are such a devoted friend of hers."

"And yours! And yours!" she exclaimed. "Speak frankly, very frankly, has she, or has she not made a lasting impression upon you?"

"Upon me? Candidly—yes—a very strong one!"

"Ah! you see!" replied Panni Bigel, her face beaming with pleasure.

"See what? I see nothing. True, I liked her very much, indeed. You, of course, can understand, what a sympathetic dear soul she is, and so kind. But what's to be done? I cannot make another journey to Kremen. I left the village in a rage. I handled Plavitzki and his daughter in such rough manner as to preclude any possibility of my return."

"You have insulted them."

"More than was necessary."

"You can apologize in a letter."

"I write a letter to Plavitzki and make apologies? Never in my life! that man heaped curses upon me."

"He cursed you?"

"Yes, as the patriarch of the family, in his own name and in the name of all his ancestors before him. Besides, I feel such a repugnance for the man, that I could not write to him two lines. He is an old pathetic comedian. I might have asked her forgiveness, but to what purpose? She must sustain her father, I am well aware of that. The best she can do is to write me a cold formal letter accepting my apologies, and that will end the matter."

"As soon as Emilyya returns from Reichenhall we will probably hit upon some palpable excuse to bring her here. It will then be an easy task to clear up the misunderstanding."

"Too late! Too late!" I gave myself a word of honor

to sell my mortgage on Kremen, and I shall certainly do it.

"Perhaps this will be for the best."

"No, it will be for the worst!" remarked Bigel. "But I will make no effort to dissuade him. I hope he will not find a buyer."

"In the meantime Emilyya will return with her Lida."

And turning to Polanetzki, Panni Bigel added: "you will see how inferior other girls will seem to you in comparison with Marinya. Though I am not as intimate with her as Emilyya, I will try to induce her to confess what she thinks of you."

This closed the conversation. On his return home Polanetzki, not without astonishment, discovered that Marinya occupied the place of honor in his heart. He could think of nothing else. And yet he felt that their acquaintance was formed and almost severed under such unfavorable circumstances, that it would be best to banish every thought of this girl, ere it was too late. As a man, strong, and sober-minded, with a tremendous will-power, he was not accustomed to cherish dreams simply because they were pleasant and fascinating. Accordingly he resolved to investigate the state of affairs thoroughly, without prejudice. True, the young girl possessed all those qualities he demanded from his future wife, and therefore, he admired her. But she also had a father he could not digest; she would also bring with her a troublesome burden instead of a dowry—Kremen with all its debts and obligations.

"I could not live one day with that pathetic monkey,"—thought he, "not one single day, for only two styles of conduct are possible with him; one must either yield in everything, which I am not able to do, or quarrel with him from dawn till dusk, as I did in Kremen. In the first event, I, a man, independent and quick-tempered, could scarcely be expected to pay homage to an old egotist. In the second, the life of my wife would indeed become a torture, and our marriage a dismal failure."

"I hope," he added to himself, "that this is a sensible, logical conclusion, which could only be wrong and deficient were I already over ears in love. But I think I am

not. I am neither conquered nor in love. This makes all the difference in the world. Ergo: I shall cease thinking of her, and let her marry the man of her choice, and—be happy!" But no sooner was this thought clothed in words than a disagreeable feeling again pressed his heart, and he thought, "and yet it is very natural that I do think of her. I have lived through in my day many an unpleasant moment, and I shall soon forget her." He soon noticed, however, that beside the unpleasant feeling of regret and remorse, there remained within his heart a feeling of pity for himself, for those beautiful vistas that showed themselves to his exalted imagination only to vanish again. Now it appeared to him as if some one suddenly lifted the curtain of his future and then just as suddenly let it drop again, and his life returned to its old course, which leads nowhere, or leads—to emptiness and desolation. Polanetzki felt that the philosopher Vaskovski was right in his assertion that money serves only as a means to live, but that beside and above it there is a living puzzle, which might be solved. There must be a certain goal, a certain important problem, the solution of which in a quiet, simple way leads to perfect rest and serenity of soul. This rest is the soul of life; without it life is senseless, worthless. In a certain sense, Polanetzki was merely the child of his age, *i. e.*, he carried in his bosom a part of that consuming restlessness which in modern days may be called the plague of mankind. The massive foundations on which life rested in olden times were in the eyes of Polanetzki crumbling down. And he groped in the darkness, doubting whether true faith was or was not giving place to a rationalism that stumbles on every stone it meets on its road. He sought for that faith he pined for, but found it not. He differed from the modern "decadents" only in that he was never disillusioned or disappointed in himself, in his nerves, in his doubts, in the drama of his soul; that he did not seek nor did he obtain a licensed diploma for weakness and laziness. He had some vague feelings that life, whatever its subtle meaning might be, mysterious or not, must be full of labor and activity. He thought that if he could find no answer to the various questions, he still was compelled to do something.

Activity might then serve as an answer, perhaps illogical, but at least strong enough to free the man thus inclined of all responsibility that remained. The building and bringing up of a family and the mutual labors and duties, either one or the other, must to a certain degree be considered a law of human nature, or men would never marry, would never care to form acquaintances. Such philosophy, strengthened by the sound, sensible, manly instincts of Polanetzki, pointed to marriage as the main goal of life. There were moments when Marinya seemed to him that haven to which his ship was sailing, struggling with fog and darkness through stormy winter nights. Now, when he thought with bitterness that the lights on that haven were not for him, that he must sail on, begin anew his voyage over unknown, turbulent seas, he was seized with a feeling of pity and pain. But his philosophy cheered him, consoled him. He found it logical, though he went to bed with the conviction that this is not it, that the time has not come yet.

The next day he went to dinner as usual, and found in the restaurant Vaskovski and Bukatzki, who were soon joined by Mashko, with his appearance of a preoccupied business man, his long side-whiskers, a monocle, flushed red cheeks, and a white waistcoat. Polanetzki at once became the center of the little group. After a cordial greeting and an exchange of immediate news, Polanetzki's journey to Kremen was the absorbing topic of conversation. They were all acquainted with the motive of the two ladies in sending him off to Plavitski, and they knew Marinya. When Polanetzki related his experience, and with a sad smile looked at his friends as if eliciting comments, Bukatzki phlegmatically remarked: "Then it means war! This young lady affects my nerves, and I think it is high time for me to go courting. A woman who travels upon a stormy path will sooner accept a proffered hand than her more fortunate sister, whose road is smooth."

"Propose to her!" impatiently suggested Polanetzki.

"You see, my dearest, there are three obstacles in my way. First, Emilyya is yet playing havoc with my nerves; second, I suffer every morning from an awful pain on the

lower part of my head, which betrays unmistakable symptoms of brain disease; and, third, I am penniless."

"You—penniless?"

"At least for the time being. I bought a few marvels in sculpture, all *avant la lettre*, and have reduced myself to penury for the rest of the month. And if I get some other art-gems from Italy, for which I have already begun negotiations, I shall be a beggar for a year to come."

Vaskovski, whose features, or his complexion resembled somewhat that of Mashko, though he was much older, and his face was more pleasant, turned upon Bukatzki his clear blue eyes, and said:

"And this is also a disease of the age."

"Collectionism and collections everywhere!"

"Oh, we are threatened with a lecture!" said Mashko.

"Well, we have little else to do," replied Polanetzki, good-humoredly.

"What have you to say against the love for collections?" asked Bukatzki.

"Not much!" replied Vaskovski. This is an antiquated and yet well-preserved habit in our days, to worship the fine arts. But don't you think that this mania savors of the ancient? I think it is very characteristic. Years ago this mania was considered an art *per se*, which all cultivated and admired, wherever it was exhibited, in museums, in temples. In our day we make collections for our private cabinets and libraries. Before, the mania for collecting rarities died with the satisfaction of the passion. Now it begins at this and ends in eccentricity. I do not allude to Bukatzki. At the present time every urchin, as soon as he saves up a few pennies, branches out as a collector of something. Often the objects are not attributes of fine art, but simply its oddities, its freaks. You see, my friends, it always appeared to me, that love and idolatry, love and dilettanteism are two different things, and I insist that the man who idolizes women is not capable of nobler feelings.

"Yes, this is possible. There is a grain of truth in what you say," remarked Polanetzki.

"This concerns me but little," said Mashko, passing his

fingers through his English side-whiskers. "In those statements I perceive first of all the hint of an old pedagogue at the fallacies of modern times."

"Pedagogue, you said?" repeated Vaskovski. First, let me remind you, that ever since a piece of bread was dropped down upon me, as if from the skies, I resigned the dignified position of spanking children and acting the part of a tyrant; second, you are certainly wrong in your presumption, I make no hints. I follow with pleasure and note every new symptom of the approach of the end of our epoch and the dawn of a new era."

"On the contrary, we are just now struggling with the waves in open sea and cannot reach the shore," said Mashko.

"Leave him alone!" remarked Polanetzki.

But Vaskovski, not at all confused or rattled, continued: "Idolatry leads to unnatural refinement, and in that refinement I see the death of all grand ideals, which give place to a low vulgar desire to make capital out of them. This is all mere paganism, but no one will voluntarily admit that we are returning to paganism."

And Vaskovski, whose eyes were as clear and transparent as a child's, reflecting only superficial objects, always focussed on the infinite, turned them now to the windows, through which were seen the gray clouds with the sun rays struggling through them.

"What a pity that my head aches so often," said Bukatzki. "It ought to be an interesting era, but I will not live to witness it."

But Mashko who called Vaskovski "a saw," felt bored with his philosophical outpourings generously offered on every possible and impossible occasion. He delved into his side-pocket, got out a cigar, and lighting it, said to Polanetzki: "Listen, Stach, do you really wish to sell your mortgage on Kremen?"

"Most assuredly. But why do you ask?"

"Because I am considering it."

"You?"

"Yes. You know that I frequently 'reflect' upon such things before I decide. We may return to the subject again. Naturally I can tell you very little to-day. But

to-morrow I will order a search of the records of Kremen, which will enable me to tell you just what can be done. Perhaps you can drop in to-morrow after dinner, and we will talk the matter over."

"All right. If it can be managed, I wish it done in as short a time as possible, for as soon as my affairs are satisfactorily arranged, I intend to leave the city."

"Whither?" asked Bukatzki.

"I don't know. The heat is very oppressive here. Somewhere in the country or to the seashore."

"That is also an old superstition," said Bukatzki. "In the city there is always plenty of shade on one side of the street, which the village cannot boast. I always walk on the shady side and keep cool. I never leave the city for the summer."

"And you, are you going anywhere?" asked Polanetzki of Vaskovski.

"On the contrary, Panni Chavastovska persuaded me to join her in Reichenhall. I may heed her advice."

"In such case, permit me to keep you company. It is all the same to me where I go. Though I like Salzburg, yet the company of Emilya and Lida will fully offset the advantages of Salzburg."

Bukatzki stretched forth his transparent hand toward the toothpicks, took one from the glass, began to pick his teeth, and finally said in the most indifferent tone:

"Envy is consuming me. I am ready to follow you. But, beware! Polanetzki, lest I should explode, like a dynamite mine."

In the words and tone of Bukatzki there was so much misery, that Polanetzki burst out laughing, and said:

"It never entered my mind, that one could fall in love with Chavastovska."

"Woe to you both!" solemnly replied Bukatzki, picking his teeth.

CHAPTER V.

THE next day after an early dinner at Bigel's, Polanetzki, at the appointed hour, went to Mashko.

It was evident that he was expected; for in the study of the lawyer a gorgeous coffee service was on the table, as well as glasses for liquor.

Mashko was busy, holding a conversation with some ladies. Indeed, Mashko's voice and the female voices now and then were heard through the open door of the reception room. Polanetzki began to examine the portraits on the walls, supposed to represent the ancestors of Mashko. These ancestors were the subject of many a malicious satire, for the lawyer's friends had their doubts about the identity of the portraits. Especially, a certain cross-eyed prelate inspired Bukatzki to make many an extemporaneous joke, but Mashko took no offense at it. He was determined, somehow or other, to unload upon the world his own august person plus his ancestors and his genius, being well aware, that, though the society which tolerated him may poke fun at him it will never dare to accuse him openly of pretentiousness. Possessing an enormous energy and boundless audacity, besides a genuine capacity for arranging business affairs, he decided that those qualities alone were sufficient to advance him on the social ladder. His enemies called him a fraud, but if he was guilty of the charge, he was unconscious of it. Descending from a family whose claim to nobility was doubtful, he treated condescendingly men of a higher and nobler origin, as if he eclipsed them with the glory of his own name; and men of wealth, as if his own fortune was much the larger, and his contract with Dame Fortune would never expire. He was very cautious not to overdo, and avoided exaggerations that are crowned by ridicule, and the center of his actions grew and expanded. At last he seemed to reach his goal. He was received every-

where, was trusted with large sums of money, which helped to build his career. His earnings were formidable, but money he did not hoard. He deemed this premature, recognizing that he must stake all for the sake of a future that would fully compensate him for all temporary losses. True, he did not squander his money, claiming that in such manner only the parvenues hope to dazzle the world; but wherever it was necessary he proved himself generous. He was also considered very accurate and punctual in his transactions. This was due to his large credit that enabled him to indulge in vast speculations. He feared nothing, and possessed, beside his boldness and determination, also a profound faith in his own good luck. Successful operations strengthened this belief.

The moving spirit of his life was rather an inborn light-mindedness, than greed for wealth. Of course, he longed to be rich, but more for the sake of being known as an aristocrat, a sort of English peer. With that purpose he even altered his outward appearance, and prided himself on his abject ugliness, which he imagined to be the stamp of aristocracy. In his thick lips, wide nostrils and red cheeks there was something unusual, something truly original. There was a certain strength, a rough vigor hidden in his features which often denote the Englishman, and that accounted for the fact that, wearing a monocle, he raised his face upward.

At first Polanetzki could scarcely endure him, but gradually he grew accustomed to him, because Mashko acted towards him with more reserve than towards the rest. It might have been the acknowledgment of a deeper respect, but it might also have been a fear to gain the animosity of a man so easily provoked as Polanetzki. At length, meeting frequently, the young men grew accustomed to each other's fallacies, and tolerated each other with more or less grace. When Mashko took leave of his fair clients and entered the dining-room, he at once divested himself of his majestic airs, and, greeting Polanetzki quite heartily, began to chat like an ordinary mortal, without his usual pretensions.

"Oh, those women! Those women! C'est toujours une mer à boire! (always a bitter drop). I invested their

capital and pay them their interest in the most punctual manner, but once a week, at the very least, they pay me a visit to inquire whether there had not been an earthquake."

"Well, what good news have you got for me?"

"First, let's have a cup of coffee."

And Mashko applied a match to the spirit burner under the coffee-urn, then added:

"I will waste but few words with you. I have seen the records. It is not an easy matter to collect the debt, but the money is positively safe. Of course, the collection will involve expense. I therefore cannot give you the full amount. My offer is two-thirds of the capital, to be paid in three payments within one year's time.

"I told you that I would sell the claim at all hazards, even at a greater sacrifice. I accept your offer. When will you make the first payment?"

"Within three months."

"Very well. In such case I will leave with Bigel a power of attorney, for I am going away."

"Ah! you are going to Reichenhall?"

"Probably."

"Bukatzki then furnished you with a sensible idea this time."

"Every man has his own ideas. Let's take you, for instance. Why do you buy this debt of mine? Is it not a mere bagatelle of a transaction for you?"

Among large transactions smaller ones are often made. This is business. You know that my social position, as well as my credit, are firmly established. But both will gain abundantly, when among my other possessions, there will be the title to a piece of land, such as Kremen. Some time ago I heard Plavitzki express a desire to sell Kremen. I should judge he is more eager to dispose of it now. The estate can be bought for a song—a few roubles added to the debt, an annuity. However, we'll see! Then when the estate has been restored to perfect condition, like a horse for the market, it will be offered to the highest bidder. In the meantime, I will be a landowner, a title which, *entre nous*, I badly need just now.

Polanetzki listened to Mashko with ill-concealed dis-

pleasure, then he said: "I must be candid; the purchase of Kremen will not be an easy task to perform. Marinya Plavitzki has set her heart against it. She, like the average woman, is in love with her old nest, and will do her utmost to resist the sale of Kremen."

"What of it? At the worst I shall become Plavitzki's creditor, but do not fear that my pocket will suffer thereby. First, I can follow your course, and sell the claim. Then, as a lawyer, I have better chances to collect it myself by pointing out to Plavitzki the means to settle."

"Of course you can foreclose the mortgage and then auction off the estate."

"Yes, this could be done, if I were not Mashko. Mashko must refrain from such an act. No, sir! I will discover other means, which perhaps even the daughter of Plavitzki may indorse. By the way, I highly esteem and appreciate the young lady."

Polanetzki, who at that moment sipped his coffee, suddenly put his cup on the table.

"Ah!" exclaimed he, "one may become the owner of Kremen by such means."

And again he was seized with a feeling of anger and dislike. His first impulse was to arise and say to Mashko: "I do not sell my claim," and leave; but he controlled himself, while Mashko, stroking his side-whiskers, continued: "What if I should adopt that way of proceeding? But I give you my word of honor, that at this moment I have no tangible plan; or rather, I have not made it clear to myself yet. I made Panna Plavitzka's acquaintance in Warsaw during the winter, and she attracted me very much. She comes from a fine family, and while their estate is on the verge of ruin, it can be saved and put in good order again. Who knows? It is a mere idea, similar to others. But I will now, as always before, remain loyal to you. You went to Kremen, supposedly to collect money, but it was an open secret why you were sent there. However, you came back enraged like a demon, and I therefore infer that you have no intentions in that direction. If you will say that my judgment is wrong, I will abandon at once, not my plan, for I repeat I have none, but every thought of it, as something utterly

impossible of realization. You have my word of honor. If, on the contrary, my judgment is right, do not cling to the principle of "neither I nor you," and do not stand in the way of the young girl. Now, I am ready to listen to you."

Polanetzki recalled his doubts and arguments of yesterday, and thought that Mashko was right in his claim, that he, Polanetzki, dare not stand between the girl and good or ill fortune. He was silent for a few moments, then said:

"No, Mashko, I have no intentions, whatsoever, concerning the young lady in question. You may marry her, or you may not. This is your affair! But I will tell you frankly, that I object to one thing, your way of buying the debt. I believe, that your plans are not formed yet; but when they do form it will not look well. It will have all the appearance of a trap skilfully laid, like a net. However, as I said, this is your own affair.

"So much my own that if that assertion was made by anyone else, I would take pains to remind him of the fact. And yet, I assure you, that were I to decide upon some such plan, the probability of which I very much doubt, I would not bid for the hand of Plavitzki's daughter, as a sort of payment for the interest on the debt. If I have the right to say conscientiously that I would buy the estate under any and all circumstances, this will give me a free hand for action. But first of all, let's talk business. I wish to buy Kremen because I need it. To employ all honest means to further that end—is my privilege."

"Very well. I am ready to sell it. Order the agreement drawn, and send or bring me a copy of it for perusal."

"The agreement is being drawn up now by one of my clerks. A little patience, and we will be able to read it, and attach our signatures thereto."

Fifteen minutes later the agreement was examined, and signed by both parties. That evening Polanetzki spent with the Bigels, and was again in a very ugly mood. Bigel's wife could not conceal her disappointment, while Bigel himself, contemplating with his characteristic correctness, towards the end of the evening, remarked:

"There is no doubt that Mashko, among others, also

entertains that plan you suggested. He may be perfectly honest in his denials, for such ideas may exist, without him knowing of their real value."

"God save Marinya from Mashko!" said Panni Bigel. "We all understood, when Marinya was here, that he was attracted by the girl."

"I was convinced," said Bigel, "that a man like Mashko would look for a bride with a splendid dowry, but apparently, I was mistaken. It is more likely now that his dream is to acquire through his wife close connection with a family of renown, in order to gain a firmer foothold in society; and moreover, finally become its leader. This is not a bad speculation on the face of it for one who commands such an extensive credit. In time he might succeed in getting a clear title to Kremen, liquidating all its encumbrances."

"Your wife mentioned, a while ago," added Polanetzki, "that Mashko thinks the world of Marinya. I recall now that Plavitzki spoke about it in the same vein."

"You see now," said Panni Bigel. "What do you propose to do?"

"Nothing. If Panna Plavitzka will find his suit agreeable, she will become his wife."

"And you?"

"In the meantime I will go to Reichenhall."

CHAPTER VI.

AND, indeed, a week afterwards, Polanetzki took his departure for Reichenhall. Before he left Warsaw he received a letter from Panni Chavastoska inquiring about the result of his journey to Kremen. He was also informed that Mashko hastened to Kremen, which bit of news affected him more than he expected. True, he promised himself to forget Marinya as soon as he reached Vienna, but failed to do so. He thought so much about the possibility of Marinya marrying Mashko that his first act after he reached Salzburg was to dispatch Bigel a letter, presumably of a business nature, in which, however, he dwelt more on Mashko's expedition to Kremen and its result. Thanks to his preoccupation with the one absorbing thought of Marinya, he listened half-heartedly to his sojourner Vaskovski, who discoursed about the relations of the Austrian empire to the world at large and its modern mission. Frequently Polanetzki's answers were not in place, corresponding little with the old man's propounded inquiries. Polanetzki was astounded by the discovery that Marinya's face was constantly before his eyes. He saw her stately, graceful figure, her pink lips with the birth-mark. He looked into her clear blue eyes, which reflected the earnest attention she paid to his words. He remembered even her dress, and the tips of her shoes looking out from under it, her tender though slightly tanned hands, and her dark curls with which the breeze played in the garden. He never suspected that he had such a sensitive memory, which retained for such a length of time every detail of a person seen and observed for a brief period. Naturally it also served as evidence that the impression was deep. There were moments when the thought flashed through his mind that all the charms he pictured to himself in his mind would come into the possession of Mashko. His

first impulse was then to prevent it at any cost, but soon he remembered with despair, that the affair was settled for good, that he must banish Marinya from his thoughts forever.

Polanetzki and Vaskovski arrived in Reichenhall early in the morning, and, through a happy coincidence, before they had time to inquire of Panni Chavastovska's whereabouts, met the lady herself and her daughter Lida in the local park. Panni Chavastovska was taken wholly by surprise, and plainly showed her delight on meeting Polanetzki, whom she did not expect. But this pleasure soon gave place to anguish and alarm, when her little idol, who was an invalid suffering from heart disease and asthma, was so excited at the sight of her old friend, that she fainted, her heart beating wildly. But such attacks were unfortunately frequent occurrences lately, and when it passed, the little group regained their merry mood once more. On their return home from the park, the little girl held Polanetzki's hand in her own, and her eyes, usually dark and sad, sparkled with joy. From time to time Lida pressed that manly hand, as if wishing to convince herself that its owner really came to Reichenhall and was now at her side. Panni Chavastovska was unable to wedge in a single word or question about Kremen; nor could Polanetzki satisfy her curiosity, for Lida chattered incessantly, showing her friend the beautiful places of Reichenhall.

"And this is nothing in comparison with Thumsee! We must go there to-morrow. You will permit us, mamma? Will you not? I am quite strong again and can walk very well."

At times she turned towards Polanetzki, and without releasing his hand, looked at him with her large thoughtful eyes, and repeated: "Ah! Pan Stach! Pan Stach!"

On his part, Polanetzki reciprocated lavishly, and, like an older brother, admonished her frequently, with mock earnestness.

"Not so fast, Lida, not so fast, my kitten, you'll get out of breath again!"

But Lida, clinging closer to him, and pursing her little lips as if in anger, whispered,

- "Don't you be so fast either."

Nevertheless, Polanetzki unwillingly stole glances at the beaming countenance of Panni Chavastovska, as if wishing to remind her that he had some important news to tell her. But the fond mother was loath to deprive her adored child of the pleasure of her friend's company, and disturbed them not. Only after dinner, which was served in the garden amid a profusion of flowers and the gay twitter of sparrows, Vaskovski was describing to Lida the life of birds, and the love of them for Saint Francis Assisi. The little girl became interested, and supporting her head with her elbow, listened eagerly. Polanetzki suddenly turned to Panni Chavastovska and said: "would you like to take a walk to the other end of the garden?"

"With pleasure," responded the widow, and turning to Lida: "you, dearest, stay here with Pan Vaskovski, we shall not be gone long." And off they went.

"Well, what's the news?" asked Panni Chavastovska.

Polanetzki began his story, but, whether it was because he wished to plead his own cause, or because the thought of Marinya touched a sensitive chord, he told his story in a very unsatisfactory manner. True, he confessed having quarreled with Plavitzki before his departure, but neglected to mention his rough-handling of Marinya, lavishing unstinted praise upon her, finally concluding: "As this cursed debt caused the rupture between Plavitzki and me which cannot but affect his daughter, I resolved to sell it, which I did by making a deal with Mashko." Panna Chavastovska, who knew next to nothing about financial transactions, and being the incarnation of simplicity herself, replied: "You have done very well, indeed, there should be no questions of money between you two."

But here Polanetzki felt ashamed at his own attempt to mislead this naïve, innocent soul.

"Yes, that is so! I think my action was wrong. Bigel does not approve of it, either. Mashko may press them; intimidate them; offer certain conditions, and at last he may sell Kremen. No, I regret that act myself, considering it to have been indelicate, and above all detrimental to our friendly relations. But I should have been the last man to do it, had I not come to the conclusion,

that it was an absolute necessity, that every thought of Marinya was an idle fancy."

"Oh, no. Do not say that. I firmly believe in destiny, and I believe that the Lord created you for each other."

"I cannot understand it. But if it is so, what use is there courting, doubting, hoping and worrying, since, come what may, I must marry Marinya?"

"I don't know. Mine may be the mind of a foolish woman, and my words void of logic, but it seems to me that God always arranges things for the contentment of all concerned. He only leaves everything to the will of the men, who often do not want to follow their destiny, thus swelling the great number of unfortunates gone astray."

"Quite possible. And yet it is easier to follow your own conviction, than some one's else.—This is a torch-light which God gave to us, to hold in our hands. Who can vouch that, under any circumstances, Marinya would have been mine?"

"I should have received her letter, giving her version of your visit to Kremen. I hope it will arrive here tomorrow, as our correspondence has the one commending feature—punctuality."

"Did she know that you were coming to Reichenhall?"

"Hardly. The fact is, that, being in Kremen, the idea had not entered my mind."

"So much the better. She will, at any rate be sincere, though she was never guilty of duplicity."

This put an end to their first day's conversation. In the afternoon arrangements were perfected for next morning's outing to Thumsee.

The party was to start early, so as to reach the lake at noon, in time for lunch, and return to Reichenhall on horseback; or if Lida's condition would permit, on foot. Polanetzki and Vaskovski met at the villa next morning at nine o'clock. Both Panni Chavastovska and her daughter were all ready dressed and awaiting them on the piazza. Both ladies looked so unusually well and striking that the old pedagogue was astounded.

"Evidently," stammered he, turning to Polanetzki and pointing to the ladies—"God sometimes creates flowers out of human beings." And indeed, Panni Chavastovska

and her daughter were the objects of admiration of the whole community of Reichenhall.

The first with her inspired angelic face looked the personification of love and maternal affection, and at the same time a being highly exalted and deeply religious. The second, with her big languid eyes, blonde head and exceedingly delicate tender features, resembled more an artistic creation, than a living child. Bukatzki, the decadent, said of her, that she was made of a mist that blushed before the morning's dawn. There was something ethereal in that little girl. This impression was strengthened by her sickness and her extreme sensitiveness. She was the idol of her mother, and pet of all her friends, but, unlike many other children, she was not spoiled by that general love and devotion. Polanetzki, who was a frequent visitor at the widow's house in Warsaw, was sincerely attached to Panni Chavastovska and her fair but sickly daughter. In Warsaw where the honor of a woman is less thought of than in any other city, gossip mongers spinned yarns about her of doubtful veracity. Panni Chavastovska was as immaculate and pure as a child, and held her exalted head high, as if not suspecting the existence of evil. She was so pure that she could not understand the necessity of probing for the causes or motives of the vile slanders. She received most gracefully those who won the favor of Lida, and refused several good offers of marriage, insisting that she needed nothing save her Lida. Only one, Bukatzki, consistently claimed, that the fair widow affected his nerves. Polanetzki, however, felt such a sincere reverence for her, that no other thought about her as a woman had ever occupied his mind for a second.

To Vaskovski's remark about the good looks of the ladies, he remarked:

"They do look marvelously well to-day, indeed," and greeting them in his usual cordial fashion, he said something similar to Panni Chavastovska. Her face beamed with pleasure as she smilingly said:

"I have some news for you. Early this morning I received a letter from Marinya, and brought it along to let you have a glimpse of it."

"Does this mean that I am permitted to read it?"

"Certainly," she said, handing him the letter.

The party of four in the meantime were slowly moving toward Thumsee, passing along the forest road. Panni Chavastovska, Lida, and Pan Vaskovski, walked in front, while Polanetzki, bending over his letter, followed behind.

Marinya wrote:

"MY DEAREST EMILYA :—I am in receipt to-day of your list of questions, to which I will endeavor to find fitting replies. I will not lose any time, either, as I am just as eager to unload some of my own thoughts and impressions. Polanetzki left us on Monday, *i. e.*, two days ago. On the first evening, I received him, as I receive every one, paying but little attention to the matter. The next day was Sunday. I was free, and we spent half a day not only together, but even alone, as papa went to the Yamishes. I scarcely know what to tell you. He is so sympathetic, so frank and outspoken; he is, indeed, so manly a man! From what he said about you and Lida, I understood him to possess a very kind, generous heart. We took quite a long walk through the garden. I bandaged his finger, which he cut, trying to move the row-boat. He spoke long and earnestly, and he spoke so eloquently, so interestingly, that I was fascinated. Ah, my dear Emilyya! I am ashamed to confess that my poor little head was caught in a whirl that evening. But you know that I am here all alone, that I work from morning till night, and but seldom come in contact with such people. It seemed to me that he came to us a harbinger from another and better world. His conquest was complete; for the entire night I could not close my eyes, thinking of him. The next morning he quarreled with papa. I had my share of his wrath, although God knows I would have given anything to avert that misunderstanding. At first it dumfounded me, and if that bad man knew how bitterly I cried in my room long afterward, he would surely have pitied me. Later I thought that he is a quick-tempered man, that probably it was papa's fault, and I therefore bear him no malice. However, let me whisper in your ear, dearest: Some inner voice tells me that he

will sell his claim to no one, if only for the privilege of coming here again. His quarrel with papa I consider trifling, unimportant. Papa himself did not take it seriously, for such is his peculiar manner of action, not dictated by his feelings or convictions. In me Pan Polanetzki won a sincere friend, who will do her utmost to see that, with the sale of Magyerovka, the motives for further disputes, and those horrid financial wrangles, shall exist no more. Then he will be compelled to come again, if only to collect his money. Don't you think so? Perhaps he, too, likes me just a wee little bit. Please do not tell him anything. Don't scold him. I know not why I have such confidence in him, but I am convinced that he will do us no harm, nor any to our dear old Kremen; and it further seems to me that this world would indeed be a lovely place to live in if all men were as good as he.

"My sincerest love to you, my dear, and to Lida. Write more particulars about the state of her health, and love me as I do you. . . ."

Polanetzki put the letter in the side-pocket of his coat, buttoned the latter, pulled his hat over his temples, and suddenly felt a desire to break his cane into small fragments and throw them into the stream. He did not do it, but murmured through his closed teeth: "Yes, she knows Polanetzki well, doesn't she? Has confidence in him, that he will do her no harm! . . . Believe in him, and how badly you'll fare!" He paused for a moment, then resumed again, showing himself no mercy: "It serves you right. She is an angel, and you are not worthy of her!"

And again he was seized by that mad desire to break his cane, to do something desperate. He now saw clearly that the heart of that young girl was ready to be his with full confidence and hope, while he had wounded it, striking her a most painful blow, the memory of which will remain and smart and pain forever.

To sell the debt was bad enough, but to sell it to a man like Mashko, this was the same as saying to the young girl: "I do not want you myself; you may marry him if you like." What a bitter disappointment it must have

been to her after all that he said to her on that Sunday; after all those friendly confessions, intended to reach and penetrate her heart. Polanetzki felt then that his words had the desired effect. Of course, he could repeat to himself now as often as he pleased, that he was under no obligations whatever; that at the first conversation with a woman, the man, like a turtle, only sticks his nose out to make an investigation, to feel his ground, but this proved a poor consolation. Finally, he not only tired in his efforts to justify himself, but was on the point of giving himself a sound and well-deserved thrashing. For the first time he recognized the truth that it was within his power to win Marinya's heart and hand, and the more that possibility seemed real to him, the greater seemed the loss. As soon as he finished reading the letter, a fierce struggle took place within him. His protestations that he must and would forget Marinya appeared ridiculous. With all his faults, he possessed a kind heart, which this letter touched to the quick and set throbbing by its expression of meekness, kindness, and readiness to forgive and even love him.

"I verily believe, I will now fall in love with her myself," he repeated as an answer to his own thoughts.

Polanetzki was in an excited frame of mind when he rejoined his friends walking ahead of him. He surprised Panni Chavastovska not a little, when he suddenly said:

"Pray, present me with this letter."

"With pleasure! A lovely letter, is it not? Why did you not confess that she got her share of your rage before you left Kremen? But I shall make no attempt to scold you. She pleads for you herself."

"Ah, if it could only do me good, I would implore you to use your whip. But it's too late now—everything is lost!"

Panni Chavastovska, however, did not share this opinion. On the contrary, noticing the excitement of Polanetzki, she concluded that the affair in which she was interested was progressing very favorably—that all would end well.

"We'll see a few months later," she said, after a short pause.

"You do not know what we may live to see," replied Polanetzki, thinking of Mashko.

"Only remember one thing," she added seriously, "that the man who wins Marinya will find her true forever, and will never find an occasion to regret it.

"I believe it. But just such hearts, once wounded, will never return to sincere friendship again."

Here their conversation was interrupted by the approach of Lida and Vaskovski. Lida, as usual, immediately took possession of Polanetzki. The forest, wrapped in the white mist of a dewy morning, interested her greatly, and she began to ply Polanetzki with questions about various trees, exclaiming now and then:

"What beauties!"

"Yes, beauties," mechanically echoed Polanetzki. His thoughts busy elsewhere.

Climbing up a steep eminence, they caught a glimpse of Thumsee. Half an hour later they were again on the wide road by the banks of the lake, which was in many places connected with the road by small bridges. Lida longed to see the fish that swam in the clear transparent crystal-like depths. Taking her hand, Polanetzki mounted one of the bridges with her. The fish, accustomed to the crumbs of bread lavishly thrown by tourist, showed no fear, and soon beneath the little feet of Lida a swarm of various fishes collected, large and small, yellowish-green and brown, with glistening backs, gaping with their round eyes, begging for crumbs.

"On our return we will bring along several loaves of bread," said Lida, "but how funny they are, gazing at us. What can they be thinking of?"

"They think very slowly," replied Polanetzki. "In an hour or two they will be thinking that they were observed by a pretty little blonde girl in a little pink dress and black stockings."

"And what will they think of you?"

"That I am a gypsy, because my hair is coal-black."

"No, you are not a gypsy. Gypsies have no homes."

"Nor have I. I could have had one, but I sold it."

Polanetzki uttered the last words in a peculiar tone, and in his voice there was so much sadness, the little

girl looked at him closely, and on her expressive, sensitive countenance there was a reflection of that sadness, as the clear water of the lake gave back the reflection of her little figure. Afterward, when they joined the rest, she cast at him from time to time her restless and inquiring eyes. At length, squeezing his hand, which she held, she asked in a trembling voice :

“What is the matter?”

“Nothing, my pussy. I only look at the lake too interested to speak.”

“And I was so delighted yesterday with the plan of showing you Thumsee!”

“That is why I am looking at it in admiration. Though there are no mountains here, it makes a very pretty scene. What little house is that on the other side of the lake?”

“We’re going to have our lunch there.”

In the meantime, Panni Chavastovska was merely chattering with Pan Vaskovski, who carrying his hat in his hand, searched every minute in his pocket for his kerchief to wipe the perspiration from his bald head. He spoke to her about Bukatzki.

“He is an Aryan, and that is why he is in a state of perpetual restlessness. Now he is stricken with a mania for collecting pictures, rare stamps, gems of sculpture and other rarities ; hoping to fill with them his growing emptiness. Ah ! Panni Chavastovska. What falls to my lot now to see and hear ! These children of our age conceal in their souls an abyss like this lake, which is bottomless, and think that it can be filled up with pictures, sculptures, Baudelaire, Ibsen, Maeterlinck and, what is worse, with scientific dilettanteism. They remind me of sick birds, who break their heads upon the walls of their narrow cages. But, to my mind, this effort to fill up the gap caused by their own emptiness is as futile, as senseless, as would be the attempt to dam this lake with one little stone.”

“But what then, can fill our life?”

“Every grand idea, every great emotion, based on the condition that they have their origin with Christ. If Bukatzki loved art in a real Christian fashion, it would afford to him that rest he is so vainly seeking.”

"Have you spoken to him about it?"

"I did, and about many other things. I have tried to prevail upon him and upon Polanetzki more than once to read the life history of Saint Francis Assisi. But they heed me not, and laugh at my suggestion. And yet he was a man, born in the Middle Ages, who converted the whole world. If we had now another man like him, the return to Christ would be widespread and complete."

It was almost noon, and the heat had increased. The lake became mirror-like in its clearness, absorbing the bright rays of the sun, and reflecting the blue skies, it looked as if sunk in sweet reveries, quiet, calm, motionless.

They finally reached the garden and house, and sat down around a table in the shade of a large tree. Polanetzki called the waiter, who appeared in a dirty-white frock-coat, and ordered dinner to be served immediately; after which they all began to admire the beauty of the surrounding scenery. Within two yards of their table grew iris, watered by a fountain erected between the rocks. Panni Chavastovska looked with longing eyes at the blooming flowers.

"Whenever I am near this lake and look at the beautiful iris, I cannot help dreaming that I am in Italy."

"Because no other country has so many lakes, and so many irises," said Polanetzki.

"Nor so much delight for every mortal," added Vasovski. "For a number of years I made my pilgrimage thither every autumn in search of a resting-place for my last days. A long time I hesitated in my decision between Perugia and Assisi; but last year I selected Rome, the ante-chamber of that world, where another, better world is seen. I will go there again in October."

"I envy you," said Panni Chavastovska.

"Why, your Lida is twelve years old—" began Vasovski.

"And three months," interrupted Lida.

"And three months, and although she is quite small for her age, and vivacious, she can be shown the various antiquities of Rome. Nothing remains so well engraved on your memory, as the scenes and objects you see in your childhood. And, though a good many things are strange

and incomprehensible, they are brought back to mind from time to time, pleasant recollections of days gone by, upon which a strong light was suddenly turned, after they remained in the somber shadow of long years. Come with me to Italy in October."

"In October,—I positively cannot. There are reasons,—purely feminine,—that demand my presence in Warsaw at that time.

"Feminine? What are they?"

"The first and most important is purely a woman's reason, the marriage of Pan Polanetzki, who now sits sad and heartbroken as if he was really over ears in love."

Polanetzki seemed to awake from his slumber, and pleadingly moved his hand. Vaskovski with the naïveté of a child, asked:

"And the bride to be is Marinya Plavitzka, after all?"

"Yes," replied Panni Chavastovska. He was at Kremen and in vain would he protest to us, that he is not conquered, captured, and enslaved."

"I never intended to deny it," said Polanetzki. The conversation was abruptly ended by the sudden relapse of Lida. She became faint, her heart-beating took that dangerous turn, for which even the doctors had grave fears. Panni Chavastovska caught the girl in her trembling arms, Polanetzki ran to the restaurant after some ice, while Vaskovski, puffing and almost falling over his burden, carried a heavy garden bench, on which the fainting child was laid.

"You are tired, my dearest girlie," said her mother, pale and frightened. "Is it not so? You see now, the distance was too great for you. The doctor gave his permission, it's true, but—How warm it is here. It will all be over soon, my poor dear little girl."

And she began to kiss the perspiring face and brow of the child. In the meantime Polanetzki returned with ice, the mistress of the house followed him with a pillow. Lida was tenderly laid down upon the bench in a more comfortable position, her head on the pillow. Panni Chavastovska converted a napkin into an impromptu ice-bag. Polanetski bent over the prostrate form and whispered: "How do you feel now, my kitten?"

"I am suffocating—no air—but still better than before!" replied Lida in a faint voice, opening her little mouth and breathing with difficulty.

Apparently, she was not much better, for even through her dress her heart was seen beating violently. Thanks to the ice, however, the attack was soon over, and the danger averted. There remained only an extreme fatigue and weakness. A smile appeared on the parched lips of Lida, which gladdened the heart of her mother. To restore the strength of the child, Polanetzki ordered dinner to be served at once, of which, however, no one partook except Lida. All eyes were turned upon her with hope and fear lest the attack should be renewed.

An hour passed. Gradually the restaurant was filling up with visitors. Panni Chavatsovska wished to return to the city, but a delay was unavoidable. The carriage Polanetzki ordered had not arrived from Reichenhall. It came at last to the relief of the mother and her alarmed friends. On the road, the little company that had set out with such happy expectations in the morning, was given another scare.

The carriage rolled on slowly, making but little progress, when the rough road and constant jolts caused another relapse of Lida. She begged to be allowed to leave the carriage; but once on the ground, proved too weak to walk. Panni Chavastovska decided to carry her in her arms. Polanetzki anticipated this self-sacrifice of the mother, naturally frail and delicate.

"Lida, my kitten, allow me to carry you, dear. You don't want mamma to be sick, do you?"

And not waiting for an answer he raised her from the ground, and carried her in his arms as if she was a feather.

To convince both mother and daughter that the burden was not heavy, he began to joke about the whole occurrence.

"When a little kitten like this crawls on the ground," said he, "she looks very small indeed, but now look at her long feet hanging down. Embrace my neck, little one, and you will not shake so much."

And he put to test his tremendous strength by walking at an even and rapid gait, in order to place her as soon as

possible under the care of the doctor. He felt the beating of her heart on his shoulder as he walked along, passing from hope to despair.

Meanwhile Lida, embracing his neck with her tiny hands, repeated sobbingly :

"Please, let me down—— oh, let me down please !"

To which Polanetzki replied :

"No, dear, I will not let you down ! Don't you see that you cannot walk. After this we will take with us a large comfortable chair on wheels, and as soon as our little girl grows tired we will put her in the chair, and I will wheel her nicely and quietly home."

"No, no, not that !" repeated Lida with tears in her eyes.

But Polanetzki carried her with much tenderness, as though he was her elder brother or father.

His heart was overflowing with sympathy, and a world of new and strange emotions before unknown to him not only because his love for the girl was genuine, but the thought just entered his mind, that married life had in store for the happy husband and father treasures of happiness and bliss he could not now fully appreciate nor understand. He felt, however, while carrying this dear yet strange child, that God destined him to be a husband and a father. That this was the bright goal of his life, for which he must strive. And all his thoughts flew to Marinya. It was clearer to him at that moment than ever before, that of all the women he had met in his life, she alone was the spontaneous choice of his heart. That she alone could become his wife and the mother of his children."

CHAPTER VII.

LIDA felt much improved the next day, but she was very weak. On the advice of the doctor, she took short walks, refraining from long trips up the steep hills. Vaskovski, fearing the worst, went to the doctor's house to find out if possible the real condition of the little sufferer. Polanetzki impatiently awaited him in the reading-room; and when at last he came his face foreboded no good. The news he brought was not of a consoling nature.

"The doctor sees no danger at present," said the old pedagogue, "but predicts an untimely death for the child. He orders a constant and ceaseless watch; for no one can foretell the day or the moment when a sudden attack will end this young life."

"How unfortunate! What a blow! exclaimed Polanetzki, burying his face in his hands. The poor mother would not survive it. The death of such a child! I can hardly believe it!"

Tears also were in the eyes of Vaskovski.

"I asked him," resumed the old man, "whether she suffers intensely during the sudden attacks. The doctor replied that the pain was insignificant. She may die as calmly, as quietly, as one sinking into a sweet slumber."

"He made no mention of it to the mother?"

"No. He merely stated that she was the victim of heart disease, which with children of tender age often disappears, leaving no trace. This case, however, he considers hopeless."

Polanetzki would not resign himself to the inevitable.

"One doctor," insisted he, "does not know it all. We must consult an expert and try to save her, as long as there is a spark of hope smoldering in our hearts. She must be taken to Monachium, to some noted specialist, or he must be brought here. It will astonish and frighten the mother,—but what can we do? However, this can be

avoided. I will write to one at once. Panni Chavastovska will, in the meantime, be informed of the presence in Reichenhall of a distinguished physician, who was brought here for a wealthy patient. The opportunity being obviously too good to miss, the rest will be an easy matter. The little one must not be neglected under any circumstance. He ought to be advised as to his mode of action with the unsuspecting mother."

"Have you decided upon anybody? Who is the man?"

"I don't know of any one myself! But the local physician will help us in the matter. Let us go and see him at once, every moment is precious."

The whole matter was arranged that same day. In the evening both friends were announced at Panni Chavastovska's villa. Lida felt well,—but gloomy and silent. True, she smiled from time to time at her mother and at her friends, thanking them as it were for their attentions, but Polanetzki's efforts to amuse and entertain her were fruitless. Thinking of her dangerous condition, he took her evident gloominess as the natural development of her disease, a premature foreboding of death; and he repeated to himself, that she was no longer the same merry, vivacious girl she had been; and that the threads of her life were being severed. His dread increased when Panni Chavastovska said to him: "Lida feels very well, but do you know what she requested of me to-day? She wants me to return to Warsaw!"

Polanetzki with a strong effort controlled his growing uneasiness, and turning to Lida, said with as gay an air as he could assume: "Oh, you little rogue! Are you not sorry to part with Thumsee?"

Lida nodded her head negatively.

"No," she said, after a pause.

Tears came to her eyes, which she tried to hide.

"What does it mean?" pondered Polanetzki.

The reason was obvious. Lida learned at Thumsee, that they wished to take away from her her friend, her "Pan Stach," as she called Polanetzki,—her most beloved friend and companion. She heard that he loved Marinya, which was a great blow to her sensitive soul. She had thought that he loved only her and her mamma. She

understood in a vague manner that he wanted to marry Marinya, while she considered him her own exclusive property. Not knowing exactly the nature of the danger that threatened her, she felt instinctively that "Pan Stach" would leave her and break her little heart. Had the offender been any one else she would endure it stoically. This hazy idea of the affair was like a sort of magic circle of a revolving wheel, out of which the child could not escape.

And how could she complain to them about themselves? Evidently they have set their hearts upon it; they want it, and will be made happy by the arrangement. Did not mamma say that "Pan Stach" loved Marinya, and he denied it not. That means that she must submit; swallow her tears in silence; say nothing even to her mamma. Thus Lida buried in the depths of her suffering little soul the first real sorrow of her life. Yes, she was forced to yield. But worry and chagrin are poor remedies for heart disease. The resignation of the child to her fate was wrought with more dangers than the anxious friends suspected. The specialist arrived in Reichenhall two days after. He examined the child and found the diagnosis of the local physician to be correct. Of course, he reassured Panni Chavastovska. But to Polanetzki he frankly admitted that the life of the child might be prolonged for months and years, but would always hang by a tiny thread, which might snap at any moment. He recommended perfect rest, and immunity from gay as well as sad impressions; in short, prescribed constant nursing. Tenderness was lavished upon the little one. She was carefully guarded from the slightest excitement, but did not escape the more injurious one that came in the shape of letters from Marinya. The second letter, that followed a week after the first, made a very grave impression upon her prematurely developed brain. True, it dispersed all her doubts about the loyalty of "Pan Stach," but it agitated her whole feeble life. Panni Chavastovska was undecided whether to show this letter to Polanetzki or not. He inquired for it every day. To deny its receipt meant to lie. At length she concluded that it was best to acquaint him with the whole truth, to show him what a stony road

he would have to travel upon. The night after the receipt of the letter Panni Chavastovska touched upon the subject. She had put Lida to bed and they were all alone.

"Marinya was greatly shocked by your disposal of Kremen's mortgage," said she.

"Oh! you received a letter?"

"Yes."

"Will you let me see it?"

"No! I can only read to you some parts of it. Marinya is disheartened."

"She knows that I am here?"

"She had not received my letter when she wrote, and was not aware of your presence here. I am surprised that Mashko, who is there now, withheld this fact from her."

"Mashko left Warsaw before I did. He was not certain whether my decision to go to Reichenhall was final, as I spoke of other places."

Panni Chavastovska, went to her desk, found her wallet containing her letters, returned to her seat, and adjusting the lamp, sat down opposite Polanetzki. Before she began to read, she remarked: "You see, Marinya is not so much affected by the fact that you sold your debt—as she is—that you stole her heart. That was a very sad disappointment indeed."

"Do you know," began Polanetzki, "that to no other person could I whisper a word about it; but to you I would fain confess that I have committed a foolish and unpardonable act, for which, however, I am sufficiently punished."

Panni Chavastovska cast at him a sympathetic glance, turning upon him her clear blue eyes. "Poor fellow," said she. "Then you are really fast in the meshes of love? You know, I hope, my question is not prompted by curiosity, but by friendship. I wish to correct your mistake. If I were only certain——"

But she did not finish her sentence. "What struck me most," interrupted Polanetzki, with fervor, "was her first letter. I liked the girl's sweet simple manners and began to think of her with a deep conviction that she was superior to all other girls it had been my fortune to know. I was not wrong. She is, indeed, the one girl I pictured

in my sweetest dreams, the one girl I ardently longed for day and night! But what of it? My decision to remain firm at all hazards; to part with nothing that is legally and morally mine, still rules every other passion. It has become a principle; and when a man once adopts a principle, it becomes a law to him, which he respects, if only to gratify his own ambitions and vanity. Besides, in every one of us, there are two men, of which the second always finds fault with the first. This second man whispered into my ear: "Leave them alone! You will never make up with her father." He is, indeed, an obnoxious character! I decided to leave them to their fate, and sold my claim. After the deed was done I discovered to my horror, that I could not banish Marinya from my thoughts. That into my mind, usually sober, came the conviction that she was the one girl I sought, the one girl that could take my heart by storm. I understood then, that my act was rash and foolish. When her letter came to you I further convinced myself that in her pure heart there was being laid the foundation of a sincere desire to love me; to become mine, as I loved her and dreamed to make her my wife. Upon my word of honor, either this is the absolute truth, or I am losing my senses! That letter struck me a death-blow and left me helpless, powerless—I cannot resist it. I cannot flee from it!"

"Under the circumstances I will not read to you her entire letter," said Panni Chavastovska, after some meditation. "She writes that her short dream ended sooner than she expected. About Mashko she asserts that he is very delicate in money matters, although he betrays a natural desire to have it settled to his own advantage."

"She will marry him! She will marry him!"

"Oh, you don't know her. As regards to Kremen, here is what she writes: 'Papa is only too glad to get rid of Kremen and move to Warsaw. But you know how dearly I love Kremen; how fond I am of every nook and corner. However, after all that has happened, I began to doubt the value of my labors and privations. Of course I have not abandoned all hope, and will fight for Kremen to the last. Papa claims that his conscience does not permit him any longer to keep me in seclusion in a village.

This is the last straw. It looks now as if everything was being done to please me! At times it sounds to me like a mean bitter irony! Mashko made papa an offer of three thousand a year and the whole sum to be realized from the sale of Magyerovka. I am not surprised at this presumably generous offer. Mashko will get the estate almost for nothing. Papa protested thus: 'According to your proposal, if I live only one year, I'll only get three thousand. Magyerovka is mine under any circumstances. Mashko proves that Magyerovka at the present state of affairs would fall into the hands of our creditors, while there is nothing to prevent papa from living thirty years longer. And he is right. I know that papa does not look with disfavor upon the project; he merely wants to strike a better bargain. There is one consolation for me in this sad turn of affairs, we will move to Warsaw. I will always be near you and Lida, on whose love and kindness I can always rely.' A pause ensued.

A moment later Polanetzki said, slowly drawling his words:

"Oh, that's how it happened! I took away from her her Kremen and sent her a sweetheart with one shot!"

Saying this, he little suspected that in her letter Marinya expressed the same sentiment. Panni Chavastovska, wishing to spare Polanetzki, made no mention of it. Mashko was an ardent suitor of Marinya during her brief visit to Warsaw. One need not be a genius to divine Mashko's purpose in buying the debt from Polanetzki and going to Kremen. This last fact intensified the bitterness that filled Marinya's heart, and that insult she believed Polanetzki intentionally flung at her.

"This must all be cleared up," remarked Panni Chavastovska.

"I sent her a husband," repeated Polanetzki,—“and I can't say that I was not aware of Mashko's intentions.”

Panni Chavastovska played with Marinya's letter, buried in her own thoughts. Finally she said with determination in her sweet, modulated voice:

"This must all be changed. At first my hope was to unite you two for the sake of the friendship I feel towards you. Now there is an additional reason why I should

accomplish this task,—and that reason is your evident despair. I would always be a victim of remorse and of conscience were I to leave you to your fate. Do not lose hope. There is a certain French proverb, very expressive indeed, suggestive, of the strength and will-power of woman. It does not sound well in Polish. But believe me, you have my profound sympathy. I will do anything to help you.”

Polanetzki grasped her hand and pressed it warmly to his lips.

“You are the best, the purest, the loveliest creature I ever laid my eyes on.”

“I was very happy once, and as I believe there is only one road to happiness, I should like my friends to find it and not be led astray.”

“You are right! There is only one road to happiness, and no other. Once I live, once I breathe the pure air, I must feel in my heart a natural desire to make my life as useful to others as to myself.”

“And since I accept the office of matrimonial agent,” continued Panni Chavastovska, laughing gaily, “I do not wish love’s labor to be lost. We must now map out our plan of action.”

With these words she lifted her eyes toward the light of the lamp. The rays fell squarely upon her round, young face, upon her somewhat disheveled blonde hair, falling in short curls over her forehead. There was something so fascinating, and at the same time so virgin-like in its simple purity, that Polanetzki, notwithstanding the fact that his own mind was absorbed with different thoughts, unwillingly recalled the name by which Bukatzki christened his fair hostess, calling her “the virgin-widow.”

“Marinya is a very plain simple girl,” said she, breaking the silence, “and she will best understand me when I disclose to her the real truth. I will tell her what you said to me; that you are greatly interested in her; that you regret your rash, thoughtless act, committed under the strain of the conviction that you could not agree with her father; that you deeply regret the whole occurrence, beg her to forget it, and not rob you of the hope that she may extend to you a forgiving hand.”

"In the meantime I will write to Mashko and offer to buy Kremen from him, and pay any interest on his investment he may demand."

Panni Chavastovska burst out in laughter: "There you have your sober-minded, your matter-of-fact business man—Polanetzki, who brags about his freedom from the frivolous Polish character, and Polish carelessness."

"Yes, yes!" he exclaimed, brightened with visions of restored happiness. "It all depends upon the fact that nothing is too good or too extravagant if the transaction is worth it. That's business."

But just as quickly he frowned and grew sullen again:

"And if she replies that she is already pledged to Mashko?"

"I will not admit of such a probability. Mashko is undoubtedly a perfect gentleman, but not of the kind to suit Marinya. She will never marry a man simply because it pays best. And I know that she has little love for Mashko. This shall never happen. You don't know Marinya. Do what you can--don't worry about Mashko."

"Instead of writing, I will wire to him at once. He can't remain forever in Kremen, and ought to receive my telegram in Warsaw."

CHAPTER VIII.

Two days later Polanetzki received Mashko's reply. It was short and commenced: "Yesterday Kremen became mine." Though from Marinya's letter this result could have been foreseen, and such a reply expected, yet it made a deep impression, nevertheless. It seemed to Polanetzki that a great calamity had happened, unexpected and irreparable, for which he alone was responsible. Panni Chavastovska, knowing Marinya's affection for Kremen, feared the worst, and did not conceal her apprehension that the sale of Kremen would retard the affairs of the young people.

"If Mashko does not marry Marinya," said Polanetzki, "he will rob old Plavitzki in such a skilful manner that his own reputation will remain untarnished, but Plavitzki will become penniless. Had I sold my debt to any other usurer, the old man might have been able to pay something and delay the crash for years to come, during which his affairs might improve. At least Kremen might then be sold on more favorable terms. If they now leave their home with nothing but unpaid debts, the blame will be laid at my door."

Panni Chavastovska detected danger in another direction.

"It matters little that Kremen is sold, if the cause of it had only been any one else but you. But after your visit, after the mutual impression received during the short but eventful visit, Marinya could not expect this from you."

Polanetzki understood this very well himself, and he believed that Marinya was lost to him forever. There remained but one thing—to forget her and seek another match. From this his whole soul rebelled. The feeling which at first was but smoldering, now became a consuming, devouring flame. This flame was kept alive by his own conviction, and finally by Marinya's letter, that

he had wronged her. He pitied Marinya, and could not think of her without becoming excited and indignant. Besides, this energetic, muscular man never could submit to the course of events. His nature refused to bow to it. His own ambition, at least, would not permit Marinya to be forgotten. The thought that, sooner or later, he would be forced to acknowledge himself the tool of Mashko, was as gall and wormwood to him. It filled his soul with rage. At times he was ready to plunge into battle with Mashko, to throw obstacles in his way, to hinder his future plans and prove to him that all the cunning of a clever lawyer must retire to secondary place before real manly energy. All these noble motives urged Polanetzki to extraordinary activity, which, however, was useless. The condition of affairs leaving no opening for action. To sit in Reichenhall, to allow Mashko to weave his spider net in which he hoped to entangle Marinya, to observe all that, and remain inactive? Oh, no! It was past his endurance. But what could he do? This question remained unanswered. For the first time in his life Polanetzki felt himself chained and fettered, and the less he was accustomed to it, the harder it was to bear it. For the first time in his life he learned the awful meaning of sleepless nights and unstrung nerves. Lida added to the common misery, getting worse every day, and it seemed as if over the little group of devoted friends a leaden atmosphere of restlessness and uneasiness hung heavily—an atmosphere in which life become a torture.

Another letter from Marinya arrived the following Monday. It contained no mention of either Polanetzki or Mashko. She merely announced the sale of Kremen; made no comments, no complaints. But between its lines one could easily read how deeply she was affected by the sale.

Polanetzki would fain prefer to read therein his own sentence. Her absolute ignoring his part in the unfortunate affair was proof positive that he was banished forever from the heart of the young girl, while her silence in regard to Mashko meant the contrary. At least, if she lamented the loss of Kremen, it was in her power to regain its possession by giving her hand and heart to its

new owner. Perhaps she had already decided upon it. True, old Plavitzki had his own noble prejudices, on which Polanetzki based his hopes; but then, knowing his selfish nature, he feared that under the circumstances he would sacrifice his noble traditions and the future of his own daughter for his own profit. One thing was certain, that it was impossible for Polanetzki to remain in Reichenhall and await the news until Pan Mashko should deem it profitable to offer his hand to Marinya. In the meantime, Lida persistently begged to be taken back to Warsaw. Polanetzki decided to return home; moreover, the time had arrived for the development of the new enterprise agreed upon with Bigel. This decision was a relief to him. He would return to Warsaw, could take in at a glance the state of affairs, and perhaps take some important action. Anything was better than the tantalizing uncertainty of affairs in Reichenhall. Panni Chavastovska and her daughter were not astonished at this decision. They knew that his visit was to be of short duration, that they were to meet again in Warsaw during the latter part of August. She promised to keep Polanetzki posted as to the progress of Lida's convalescence, and the complications arising in Kremen. The day of Polanetzki's departure found the little group sad and gloomy. They all gathered at the railroad station to bid him farewell. Polanetski was eager to return home, yet loath to part with his friends; for the success awaiting him in Warsaw was uncertain, while here he was surrounded by the best friends he ever had in the world. Leaning out from the window he gazed into the sad and thoughtful eyes of Lida, and the smiling, sympathetic face of her mother, with such a feeling of affection and devotion as though they were of his own flesh and blood. Again his eyes were dazed for a moment by the striking beauty of the fair widow, the tender, delicate features of her face, the angelic expression, and the stately, virgin-like figure attired in black.

"Farewell!" said Panni Chavastovska, "write me from Warsaw. We'll meet again in about three weeks from now."

"Three weeks!" repeated Polanetzki. "I will not fail to write to you. Farewell, Lida!"

"Farewell. Remember me to Eva and Yagassia."

"I will."

"And once more he held out his hand through the window: "Farewell! don't forget your friend."

"We won't; indeed, we won't! Do you want us to pray for you?" asked the widow, laughingly.

"Thanks for the offer. Good-bye, professor!"

A shrill whistle, and puffing and panting, the locomotive started. The ladies waved their handkerchiefs, until Polanetzki, bowing and smiling, disappeared in a cloud of steam and smoke.

"Mamma," asked Lida on their return home, "must we really pray for Pan Stach?"

"We must, Lida, we must! He is so kind to us. We must pray to God that He grant to Pan Stach happiness."

"Is he not happy, mamma?"

"No, my dear. . . . You see, we all have our troubles. . . . He has his own."

"I know it. I heard of it in Thumsee," said Lida. Then she added in a whisper, "I will pray for him."

The professor, Vaskovski, who with all his dignity had no control over his tongue, took advantage of the first opportunity, when Lida walked ahead, to tell Panni Chavastovska: "Polanetzki has a good heart. He loves you both like a brother. When the specialist reassured me that the child was in no immediate danger, I may just as well tell you, it was Polanetzki who sent to Monachium for him, as the child's health worried him exceedingly."

"He?" asked the widow in astonishment. "Now you see what a kind friend he is!" and tears of gratitude welled up in her eyes. "I will not remain his debtor," she added after a pause. "Marinya must and will be his."

Polanetzki's heart, as he left his friends, was also filled with love and gratitude to Panni Chavastovska, for the natural reason probably that a man in his condition is apt to fully appreciate the sympathy and friendship of his fellow-beings. Sitting in the corner of the car with the fascinating image of the young widow still fresh in his memory, he said to himself: "Had I but loved her, what serene happiness would have been mine! The goal of life would have been reached. I would have known ex-

actly what I lived and struggled for; that my life had some purpose, that it was worth living. True, she repeatedly asserted that she'll never wed again. But who knows. She may be more perfect, more level-headed, but her heart might be dry and empty. But immediately he felt that while he thought of Emilyya with the quiet deep love of an elder brother, the very mention of Marinya's name set his heart throbbing wildly, and he was seized by a disagreeable yet entrancing sensation of uneasiness, restlessness. He felt that something, some magnetism attracted him to her, which he was powerless to resist. When he held the widow's hand in his the touch of its little fingers left no impression whatever. Yet he remembered very distinctly the intoxicating warmth of Marinya's hand, and the very recollection of it made him feverish. Thus he spent his time till Salzburg was announced by the conductor. Here his thoughts assumed a more definite shape. While he came to no decision, he at least considered the question as to how he would act under the circumstances.

"I do not deny that I was the cause of the loss of Kremen," thought he. Kremen represented to Marinya not only a certain value of an estate when sold under favorable conditions, but an object of affection, thanks to its association with people and objects so dear to her heart. I have robbed her of both. Legally my action is above reproach; but conscience, which is made of higher and more delicate material than dry law clauses, finds it insufficient. I sinned, and I confess it. I therefore must do my utmost to atone for the wrong committed. But how? I cannot buy Kremen from Mashko—my means do not permit of it. There is only one way to do it, to dissolve partnership with Bigel, and release my capital invested in the business. This will almost ruin Bigel. Ergo—it is impossible. One escape remains. I must resume my good relations with Plavitzki; in due time propose to Marinya, and, if jilted, at least have the satisfaction of knowing that I did all an honest man could do."

But then the other man within him raised his voice. Said he: "Your appeal to your conscience is but a poor farce. Had Marinya been ten years older and homely of

face, the blame for the sale of Kremen would have been yours, just the same. Only you would never dream of proposing to her. Better confess right here that there is something in that girl so fascinating, that she attracts you so much with her face, eyes, lips, shoulders, her whole dainty figure, that a strong team could not drag you away from her. Better call white—white,—and do not deceive yourself.”

But these thoughts were short-lived and were brief and unwelcome. Polanetzki reasoned: “First, my dear simpleton, you don’t know that I am compelled, under all and any circumstances, to compensate her for this wrong. That at the present moment I prefer to show my repentance and offer compensation in the shape of my heart and name, is but very natural. Men always propose to the women they love and not to those they hate. The outer man attempted timidly to make several remarks, for instance, that Pan Plavitzki might throw Pan Polanetzki down the stairs, that Panna Plavitzka might close the door in his face; but somehow he was not afraid of that. “People are not so revengeful now-a-days,” thought he, “and if the Plavitzkis are of that sort, the worse for them.”

He insisted that if they possess a grain of tact, he would be accorded at least, a polite and friendly reception, and at last what is to prevent him from meeting Marinya at Panni Chavastovska’s?

At Salzburg Polanetzki was compelled to wait over an hour for the arrival of the train from Monachium, which he was to board for Vienna. He was about to take a stroll through the main streets of the town, when passing the waiting-rooms for the first-class passengers, he suddenly espied the rather loud-checked coat of Bukatzki, his monocle and small head, covered with a still smaller felt hat.

“Bukatzki or his ghost!” exclaimed Polanetzi.

“Calm yourself!” phlegmatically replied Bukatzki—shaking hands with him as if they had just parted.

“Well, how are you?”

“What are you doing here?”

“Eating a cutlet fried in margarine.”

“Going to Reichenhall?”

"Yes. And you, home already?"

"How!—Yes!"

"You proposed to Chavastovska?"

"No."

"Then, you are forgiven. You may proceed on your journey."

"Keep your jokes for a more favorable occasion; I am not in the humor for them. Lida is in great danger."

Bukatzki sobered up immediately, and raising his eyebrows, said:

"Oh! Oh! Is that true?"

Polanetzki described in a few words Lida's recent attack, and the opinion of the eminent physician he consulted. Bukatzki was silent for a few moments, then he said:

"Now, pray tell me, how can one help being a pessimist! Poor child, and poor mother! I cannot imagine how she will ever bear her loss."

"She is very religious, still I shudder at the thought of such a possibility."

"Let's take a walk. I want some fresh air. It is suffocating here."

They went out. Bukatzki, now extremely alarmed, repeated:

"How can I help being a pessimist? Such a bright child, as Lida! A pure, innocent dove! Everyone would pity her, save Death."

Polanetzki was silent.

"I am really at sea now myself," continued Bukatzki. "Whether it is the proper thing for me to go to Reichenhall. With Panni Chavastovska constantly before my eyes in Warsaw, I can somehow manage to endure life there, without fleeing abroad. About once a month I declare to her my undying love and admiration, receive my usual, 'no, thank you,' and live again in hopes, patiently waiting for my next chance to propose, month in and month out. Now, the first of the month is long recorded in history, and I begin to feel lonesome without my customary pension. Does the mother understand the real condition of her daughter?"

"No. Though the little sufferer is past all hope, she may linger a year or two more."

"Bah! Who knows how long either of us will make this wicked world his abode? Do you often think of death?"

"No. Why should I? What good would it do me? I know that I must give up the fight sooner or later, and do not bother my head about it any more than it is good for my constitution. Besides it's a little too early yet."

"That's just where the fun of the thing comes in. We know very well, that we must give up the fight, yet we struggle on to the end, like an unsuccessful litigant, making appeal after appeal only to submit to the highest tribunal. There is the whole idea of life. Otherwise life would be a yawn-provoking vaudeville; while now,—it is a silly drama. As to myself, I have three alternatives; hang myself, go to Reichenhall, or to Monachium to admire Boecklin's paintings. If I were logical, I would choose the rope. But as I am not, I will go to Reichenhall. The widow is certainly a more worthy object of admiration, than all the figures Boecklin ever painted, both as to coloring and drawing."

"What's new in Warsaw?" suddenly asked Polanetzki. Have you seen Mashko?"

"I have. He bought Kremen, and poses now as a 'gentleman with estates.' He is clever—the dog, and does his utmost at the same time not to seem overbearing. He is very polite, considerate, accessible; in short he has undergone a wonderful change in that short space of time. Naturally, not for the benefit of you or myself, but for Pan Mashko."

"He is not going to marry Panna Plavitzki?"

"So far, it seems doubtful. His intentions, however, are an open secret. Your partner Bigel said something about him, and about Kremen. I believe it was to the effect, that he bought the land very reasonably. You will get all the information you seek in Warsaw."

"Where are the Plavitzkis?"

"In Warsaw, at the Hotel Rome. The girl is not at all bad looking. I paid them a visit, as a cousin, and spoke of you."

"You could have chosen a more agreeable subject."

"You are mistaken. Old Pan Plavitzki pretends to be

delighted with the turn his affairs have taken. He claims that you have done them a great service, unintentionally, perhaps, but you did nevertheless. I asked my fair cousin, how she happened to receive you in Kremen, a stranger she had never laid her pretty eyes on before. She answered, that during her visit to Warsaw, you were roughing it abroad."

"True. Our business interests demanded my presence in Berlin, and I remained there, much against my own will, for many a month."

"I failed to notice any ill-feeling toward you. I heard a good deal about the young lady's devotion to her fields and granaries, to her work of managing a crumbling estate, and naturally expected to find her nursing a grudge, caused by your *coup d'état*. But she showed no evidence of it."

"May be, she is holding in check her just ire and indignation, to turn them loose against me at the first opportunity. She will have it very soon. I shall be their guest once more."

"Ah! . . . Well, then please do me a slight favor. Marry her, for of two evils I always prefer the least. I'd much rather call you cousin, than Mashko."

"I'll do it," curtly replied Polanetzki.

CHAPTER IX.

ON his return to Warsaw Polanetzki immediately went to Bigel's, where the latter acquainted him with all the details of Mashko's purchase of Kremen. The conditions were indeed very favorable to Mashko. He agreed to pay the old man thirty-five thousand roubles within one year, to be realized by the sale of Magyerovka; and in addition, an annuity of three thousand roubles, to cease at the death of Plavitzki. Polanetzki considered these conditions quite reasonable even for Plavitzki, but the conservative Bigel differed.

Said he: "I do not form my opinions so quickly, and am slow to judge others, but I must say that Plavitzki is an old egotist. For the sake of his own temporary material welfare, he was not averse to sacrificing the future of his own daughter. He is a light-minded, easy-going man. In this transaction the annual payment depends entirely on the fate of Kremen. As it is now, the estate, like a swamp, will only absorb money, and has a fictitious value as a selling commodity. It will be well, if Mashko places the land and buildings in good shape; but if not, he will necessarily delay the payments, with the result that the Plavitzki's won't see a copper for years. What can he do? Take Kremen? Impossible! By that time Mashko will have contracted so many new debts, if only to pay the old claims, that in case of a crash or his becoming bankrupt,—God only knows how many creditors will stretch out their arms toward that unfortunate piece of land. Of course, as I said, it all depends upon Mashko's honesty. He may be a conscientious man, but his mode of doing business is certainly very erratic, irregular, and one false step will precipitate him and those who confide in him into a terrible abyss. Who knows but this very act, this purchase of Kremen, is but the beginning of the end; for

in order to re-establish the value of the estate, he may exhaust all his sources of credit."

"At any rate Plavitzki will have a snug sum as his share of Magyerovka," remarked Polanetzki, wishing to allay his own fears for their future.

"If only the old sinner will not squander it or lose it at the green table."

"Having been the cause of this sale, I believe, I must do something for them now to assure their future comfort."

"You?" asked Bigel, in astonishment. "I thought that between you and them all ties were severed."

"I will try to re-establish myself in their graces. I will call upon them to-morrow."

"I hardly think you ought to expect a cordial reception."

"I doubt it very much, myself."

"If you wish, I will accompany you. The main thing is to break the ice. However, you may not be received at all. What a pity my wife is not here. I spend my evenings in solitude, all alone with my 'cello, but in the afternoons my time is my own and I can go wherever I please."

Polanetzki declined the offer. The next day, after spending more time than was his custom in making his toilet, he went to Plavitzki alone. His head was a chaotic mass of thoughts, doubts and reflections. What will he say and do under the circumstances? He knew beforehand what a reception there was in store for him.

"I will be frank and outspoken, but not rude," said he to himself. "This is by far the best policy."

He did not notice that he was at the entrance to the "Hotel Rome." His heart throbbed wildly.

"I would they were not home. I would leave my card, and then await Plavitzki's return visit."

But at the same moment he added to himself: "Be brave," and mounted the staircase. Learning from the porter that Plavitzki was in, he sent up his card, and a moment later was invited into his apartments. Plavitzki was sitting at the window, writing letters, tugging from time to time at his costly pipe with an amber stem. At the sight of Polanetzki, he raised his head, looked at him quizzically

through his gold spectacles, and said, slowly emphasizing every word :

"Come in, sir, pray come in. You are quite welcome!"

"I was informed by Bigel yesterday of your presence in Warsaw, and came to pay you my respects."

"This is very kind of you. To be candid, I did not expect it. We parted anything but friends, for which, however, you alone were to blame. But as you deemed it your duty to call upon me first, I am ready once more to open my arms to you."

The opening of arms this time was limited to a simple greeting and stretching out of his right hand across the table. Polanetzki shook that hand quite warmly, thinking, at the same time, "May the devil take me if I came here for your sake. I do not feel under any obligation to you whatsoever."

"Are you going to establish yourself in Warsaw?" he asked, after a short pause.

"Yes, although I am an old village resident,—accustomed to rise with the sun, used to my daily labors. It will certainly go hard with me in Warsaw. But my personal welfare must be jeopardized to bring about the success and happiness of my daughter, and again I make a sacrifice."

Polanetzki, who spent two nights in Kremen, knew that Plavitzki's sun rose at eleven, that his daily labors benefited his own person only. He made no remark, however, his mind being absorbed elsewhere. The room occupied by Plavitzki was one of a suite of two. The doors were open, and Polanetzki, who had fixed his gaze upon those doors since his entrance, thought that Marinya was there, but evinced no desire to make her appearance. He listened patiently enough for some time to Plavitzki's chatter, but finally interrupted him with the blunt question :

"Shall I not have the pleasure of seeing Marinya?"

"Marinya went out to inspect the rooms I found this morning. I expect her back every moment. 'Tis not far from here. A place—not a flat! I will have a study and a bedroom. Marinya's room is a beauty. The dining-room needs more light, but this is not much of an objection, for the parlor is a darling."

Plavitzki went on describing and lauding his new lodgings like a child, easily amused by everything, or an old man, spoiled by fortune, on whom that fickle dame, after a period of neglect, is smiling once more.

"I tell you, life is different here, my boy. Scarcely had I arrived in the city before I found these rooms. Oh, Warsaw is an old chum of mine. I know the city too well."

At this moment some one entered the adjoining room.

"This must be Marinya," said Plavitzki; then added louder: "Marinya, is it you?"

"I just came in, papa," answered a familiar young voice.

"Come here; we have a visitor."

Marinya appeared on the threshold. At the sight of Polanetzki her face betrayed the utmost astonishment.

Polanetzki rose and bowed to her, and when she approached the table he held out his hand, which she shook politely and coldly. She then turned to her father, as if there was no one else in the room.

"I saw the flat," she said, "and found it very nice and comfortable. I only fear the street is too noisy."

"All streets are noisy here," remarked Plavitzki; "this is not a village."

"Excuse me, I am going to take off my hat," said Marinya to no one in particular, and went into her room, whence she did not come out for a long time.

"She won't come out again," thought Polanetzki. But she apparently was busy arranging her hair before the mirror. She finally came into her father's room and asked:

"Am I disturbing you?"

"Not at all," replied Plavitzki; "We have no more accounts to settle and wrangle over, a fact which makes me the happiest of men. Pan Polanetzki came here prompted by etiquette, I presume."

Polanetzki blushed, and wishing to change the trend of the conversation, said:

"I have just returned from Reichenhall and brought you regards from Panni Chavastovska and her daughter Lida. This is one of the motives that emboldened me to call upon you."

For a moment the coldness disappeared from Marinya's face.

"She wrote me of Lida's attack," said she. "How is the child now?"

"She has had no other attack."

"I expect a letter from Emilyya. Perhaps she has sent one, but I have not received it. She probably thinks we are in Kremen yet?"

"It's all right. They'll send it here immediately. Before leaving Kremen I ordered all mail to be re-addressed to Warsaw."

"You don't intend to return to the village again?" asked Polanetzki.

"No, never again!" replied Marinya, whose eyes had again assumed a cold expression.

Again silence ensued. Polanetzki gazed at the young girl, and seemed to struggle with himself. Her face attracted him with a magic force, in the existence of which he never believed before. He felt, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that the girl fascinated him, that she was the girl he could love, that she was the ideal he dreamed of,—and he was piqued by her coldness and apparent indifference. "I knew that you loved Kremen," he suddenly said, "and notwithstanding it, I perhaps became the indirect cause of its loss to you. If it is so, I will admit frankly that I exceedingly regret it, and shall never cease to feel sorry for my rash act. In my defense I can only plead that it was not done thoughtlessly, on the spur of the moment. On the contrary, I meditated over it long and often, but my thoughts were as unreasonable as my decision was absurd. The more I consider my offense the more I throw myself on your mercy and beg your forgiveness."

At these last words he rose to his feet. His cheeks were crimson, in his eyes sparkled truth and frankness, but his words made no impression. He had not chosen the right way of approaching Marinya. Evidently he had but a scant knowledge of women in general, and could not divine how much their judgment of men depended on their own feelings.

On the basis of such feelings and emotions everything may be accepted as genuine or spurious coin, everything

may be defined good or bad, real or unreal, true or false ; stupidity may be taken for cleverness, cleverness for stupidity, egotism for self-sacrifice and *vice versa* ; roughness for bluntness, and bluntness for a lack of delicacy in feelings. Such was the case with Marinya. She felt herself insulted by Polanetzki from the very moment Mashko set his foot on the soil of Kremen. She listened to his frank confession with scorn, and her first thought was : " What manner of man is he, who admits his actions to be stupid, harmful, though they were carefully planned and devised only a short time ago ! "

The appearance on the scene at Kremen of Mashko, and the significance of his visit, was still a fresh open wound which was easily irritated and caused intense pain. And now it seemed to her that Polanetzki delighted in keeping this wound open with the full consciousness of a man with an unkind nature and iron nerves.

He stood at the table, gazing at her, and waited for the outstretched hand of her whose forgiveness would bring him happiness. But her eyes grew dim, as if clouded by pain and anger, and she grew colder than before.

" Pray, do not worry," she said with cold politeness. " Papa is very well satisfied with the deal, and the terms offered by Pan Mashko."

She, too, rose to her feet, thinking probably that Polanetzki desired to take his leave. However, he lingered for a moment, astonished, stupefied, deceived, and filled with the humiliation experienced by men jilted and cast aside. Rage boiled within him.

" Then," said he, " I desire nothing better myself."

" Yes, yes ! . . . I've closed a good bargain ! " concluded Plavitzki.

Polanetzki took his leave. Going down the stairs of the hotel, two and three steps at a time, his hat over his eyes, he repeated to himself : " My foot will never enter here again ! "

However, he felt that he would be consumed by rage, were he to return home. He walked on aimlessly, knowing not whither he went. It seemed to him at that crucial moment that he did not love Marinya, that in fact he detested her. And yet, could he but bring himself to think

calmly, the shock of the meeting would seem greater, more disastrous. He had seen her once more, looked at her, compared the image that he cherished in his heart with the original before him, now grown more fascinating than ever. And notwithstanding his rage, in the depth of his soul a feeling of delight and exultation was born. There existed two Marinyas: One, meek and generous, willing to love, in short, Marinya from Kremen. The other, a cold Warsaw damsel, who repulsed him. Polanetzki would not for a moment admit that Marinya could be such as he found her this morning. In his rage there was more amazement than malice. Not being conceited, and yet aware of his own worthiness, he was sincerely convinced that he had only to offer his hand and it would be eagerly accepted. To-day's reception dispelled the illusion. This meek maiden appeared not only in the rôle of a stern judge who condemns, but also in the rôle of a dignified queen whose grace one might gain and lose. Polanetzki could not become reconciled to this thought; it tortured him. But such is human nature. When he discovered the fact that he was not so desirable a match as he thought, that she not only did not raise him above herself, but put him down below her own worth and value; in spite of his insult and consuming wrath, he increased tenfold in his own estimation. His vanity was wounded, but his strong will longed to plunge into battle with all obstacles, visible and invisible, and overcome them. Buried in his own tormenting thoughts he had failed to notice the direction he had taken until he found himself finally near the Vistula, and mentally put to himself the sobering question.

"What in the devil did I come to Praga for? He halted. The day was lovely and drawing towards evening. The Vistula looked a mass of melted gold in the bright glow of the setting sun. Beyond the majestic river and the group of trees near by, a great expanse of fertile land was seen, hidden at the horizon by a blue-pinkish mist. There in that mist was Kremen, which Marinya loved so well, and which she had lost so suddenly.

Polanetzki's glance was turned thither.

"I am curious to know," muttered he to himself, "what

would she do, if I should redeem Kremen and return it to her?"

He found no response to his own question. Instead, he imagined how the loss of the land must have grieved the sensitive, emotional girl, and he began to pity her. In this compassion melted and disappeared his own imaginary wrongs as in a deep veil of mist; while his conscience whispered that he had received what he deserved.

"I am still thinking of her," said he, returning to the city.

Indeed, he could not banish her from his mind. Never, in the most important of his business transactions had he experienced such restlessness, such indecision. And now for the first time the remark of Vaskovski, that Polanetzki could not put his whole soul into money-making, came back to his mind. And he marveled why it was really so.

It was almost nine o'clock, when Polanetzki looked in at Bigel's. His phlegmatic partner was all alone in the spacious apartments. He was seated at the door leading to the garden piazza, and let his fingers wander over the cello with such power of touch, that everything in the room thrilled and trembled. At the sight of Polanetzki he stopped abruptly, in the midst of some "tremolo," and asked:

"Have you called on the Plavitzki's?"

"I have."

"Well, how's Marinya?"

"Like a bottle of frozen water. For a day as sultry and hot as this, it ought to be pleasant. Generally, they are very polite affable people."

"I foresaw this."

"Go ahead, play! Play!"

Bigel resumed playing his "Träumerei," and during the operation, blinked his eyes, or gazed at the moon.

In the stillness of the beautiful night the music seemed to fill with sweet, vibrating tones, the house, the garden, and the night itself. He finished, was silent for a few moments, then finally said:

"I have a plan. When Panni Chavastovska returns, my wife will extend to both her and Marinya an invitation

to visit her cottage in the country. Maybe that ice that is freezing your affection will melt there."

"Play again from 'Traumerei.'"

Once more the 'cello, under the magic touch of Bigel's fingers gave forth torrents of intoxicating sounds. Polanetzki was too young yet, not to be somewhat of a dreamer himself. Therefore, a moment later, charmed by the music and lulled into a sweet reverie, he imagined that **Marinya** sat beside him listening to the "Träumerei." That he held her hands in his own. That her pretty head was on his breast. She who loved him and was beloved.

CHAPTER X.

BEING a well-bred man Plavitzki returned the compliment to Polanetzki and called on him on the third day. He did not call the next day, because haste would betray a desire to preserve friendly relations, not on the fourth or fifth day, that would indicate a woful lack of worldly manners. He paid his respects according to all requirements of that science: "Savoir vivre." Plavitzki boasted of this knowledge in all its various shades, which he considered the greatest wisdom of mankind. A considerate man, he admitted the existence of other branches of science, but he insisted that men of science had no right to unload their pretenses on others.

Polanetzki was just then in a mood, when anything that bore some relation to Marinya was welcome. He concealed with difficulty his joy at beholding Plavitzki. That joy was manifested in his warm cordial reception of the latter.

Polanetzki was astonished at the influence the city exercised over the old man. He underwent a peculiar change in appearance. His hair, liberally pomaded, shone like the wings of a raven. His small mustaches were bristling upward, as if rivaling the color of his hair. A spotlessly white waistcoat covered his stately chest, while a *boutonnière* in the lapel of his black coat gave his whole figure a holiday appearance.

"'Pon my honor, uncle, I did not recognize you at first," exclaimed Polanetzki. "I thought some youth was entering my rooms."

"*Bon jour! Bon jour!*" replied Plavitzki. "The day is cloudy, and the room is somewhat dark, that is why you thought me a youth."

"Cloudy or clear, but what a figure!" And walking round and round, Polanetzki continued: "What a figure, just like a girl's, would I had such a figure!"

Plavitzki confused by this unceremonious reception, and yet delighted at the apparently sincere surprise he evoked by his appearance, defended himself weakly, and said: "*Voyons!* you madman! Let go! I may become angry. You're crazy!"

"Now all the girls will be at your mercy."

"You think so?" asked Plavitzki, seating himself.

—"I think you came here for the purpose of depriving me of the girls' admiration."

"What nonsense! You're crazy, man!"

"And Panni Yamish? Haven't I seen with my own eyes."

—"What?"

Plavitzki closed one eye, protruded his tongue, then raised his eyebrows and said: "You see, my lad! Panni Yamish is good enough for Kremen. I will admit frankly that I abhor affectation, because it always reminds me of provincialism. God grant forgiveness to Panni Yamish, but she bored me with her affectation. A woman must have the courage to become old, and then all her actions will become those of pure friendship; otherwise, her life is a mere slavery."

"Then you were a butterfly in bonds?"

"Do not say that," replied Plavitzki with dignity. "Do not imagine that there was anything between us. And had there been anything to speak of, you would never hear a syllable about it from me. Believe me, that there is a great difference between men of my day and men of the present generation. We perhaps, were no saints, but we knew enough to keep silence, and this, my boy, is a genuine virtue, without which true nobility does not exist."

"From all of which I conclude, that you will not tell me where you are going with this red *boutonnière*."

"On the contrary. Mashko invited me and several other friends to a jolly breakfast. At first, I refused, being loath to leave Marinya alone. But I have spent enough dreary years for her sake in the village, and am now going to get some enjoyment out of life. Are you not invited?"

"No."

"I am surprised. You may be a 'speculator' as you style yourself, but your family is a good one. Besides,

Mashko is only a lawyer. To tell the truth, I did not expect to see him established so well."

"Oh, Mashko may walk on doubtful ground."

"And yet he is received everywhere. In my time I was prejudiced against him myself."

"And are you not now?"

"No. I must confess that he treated me in the Kremen affair like a gentleman."

—"And your daughter,—does she share your opinion?"

"Probably; although I fear that Kremen lies heavily like a Kremen (stone) on her breast. It was for her sake only that I sold the land; but youth does not understand it. I knew we must face the inevitable, sooner or later, and am now ready to endure calmly any and all troubles. As to Mashko,—Marinya cannot consistently blame *him* for anything. True, he bought Kremen, but——"

"He is willing to give it back?"

"As you belong to our family, I may just as well say, that he is—he was greatly interested in Marinya during her first sojourn in Warsaw, but then his suit was not successful. The girl was young, and she did not like him. I looked at it rather unfavorably myself, for I was warned that his antecedents—his ancestors were not—were doubtful, in fact. Bukatzki made Mashko the target of his witticisms, and there the matter ended."

"Evidently, it did not end, if it begins anew?"

"Because I am now convinced that he descends from a good old family, Italian, I believe. In olden times their name was Masco; they came from Bonne, and settled in Bielorussia (Central Russia). He resembles an Italian very much, as you may have noticed."

"No, he resembles a Portuguese."

"Well, it's all the same. But you just think of this: to sell Kremen and get it back,—it takes a great mind to invent such a scheme. I believe these are his intentions. But Marinya is a wonderful girl. Although I hate to say it, a man will sooner understand a stranger than his own flesh and blood. If she says: 'Paris vaut la messe,' as Talleyrand said."

"And I thought it was Henry IV. who gave utterance—to——"

"Because you are a speculator, a man of this modern age. You young chaps, history and her ancient adages will not fit. You prefer to hoard money. But to return to the subject. It all depends upon Marinya. I should be the last man to force her to anything she has set her little heart against. With our large acquaintance and splendid family connections, she may hope for a still better match as soon as we enter society again. This process of looking up old friends and making new ones, is very disagreeable, but what would you do? What must be,—shall be! Do you presume I am going willingly to participate in this breakfast? No! But I must open my doors to young men.

"I hope you will not forget us."

"No, I will not forget you. Do you know what they told me about you? That you are devilish lucky in making money. I really don't know, whom you resemble,—not your father,—I am sure. At any rate, it is not for me to blame you! Though you pressed me to the wall, showing no mercy; though you treated me like a wolf does a lamb, yet there is something about you, for all that, something I like, and for which I feel a weakness."

"It's mutual," replied Polanetzki.

Plavitzki did not deceive himself. He had an instinctive regard and admiration for wealth; and this young man who had acquired a fortune evoked in him an admiration bordering on sympathy. This was not a vantage of a relative come to beg for aid, and Polanetzki, though he had no other selfish plans, resolved to retain his friendship. Toward the close of his visit he began to examine his host's lodgings.

"You live very comfortably," said he.

And that was true. Polanetzki occupied splendidly furnished rooms as though he intended to marry. The air of ease and comfort everywhere was a source of pride and pleasure to him, and made him believe that his heart's desire was fulfilled.

Plavitzki was loud in his admiration of the parlor, beyond the open doors of which was the other room, luxuriously fitted up, and finally asked:

"Why don't you get married?"

"I am going to at the very first opportunity."

Plavitzki smiled, as if divining the identity of his wife to be, and added:

"I know, I know—your future wife."

"So!" exclaimed Polanetzki. "There! How can I conceal anything from an old diplomat!"

"Aha! What—you marry a widow—a fair young widow!"

"My dear uncle."

"What? God bless you, my boy, as I bless you! And now—'tis time to go. Time for breakfast. And this evening for a concert at Dolina."

"In the company of Mashko?"

"No, with Marinya. But Mashko will be there."

"I, too, am going to take it in with Bigel."

"Oh! Then we'll meet again. One mountain will never meet another,—but one man another—always."

"As Talleyrand said."

"Yes. Good-by!"

Polanetzki loved music at times, but had no intention of going to the concert until Plavitzki mentioned the affair. The desire to see Marinya grew within him.

After Plavitzki departed, he pondered for some time over the question: "To go, or not to go;" but this was only for form's sake. Bigel, who came for a business consultation, was perfectly willing to accompany him; and at about four o'clock in the afternoon they alighted at Dolina. Autumn was in the air, but the day was bright and warm. The crowd had a midsummer air about it. Light dresses, colored umbrellas; and their owners, young maidens dressed like multi-colored butterflies warmed by the sun's golden rays, were very much in evidence. Among this bevy of beauties, predestined to love and be loved, to seek and find adventures, Marinya was to be found. Polanetzki remembered the early years of his gay student-life, when he fell in love at first sight with unknown charmers, and watched them longingly, as they mingled and became lost in the crowd. Very often he mistook one for another, owing to the resemblance of hat, hair and general appearance. Time and again he mistook various girls for Marinya, and every time he said to him-

self,—“This is she”—his heart began to throb violently, and a restlessness he could not define took possession of his soul. But to-day he was angered at his own deception. It seemed to him ridiculous. He felt that the seeking of such meetings and interviews, and the absorbing and centering of a man's thoughts on one being increased the fascination for it. While he thus scanned the crowd, looking for her he longed to see, the band began to play. Propriety demanded that they sit down and listen to the various airs, which Polanetzki did with evident impatience, angry at Bigel, who, with open mouth and closed eyes, listened motionlessly, all absorbed in the execution of a familiar selection. When it was finally ended, he noticed the glistening high hat and dark mustache of Plavitzki, and a moment later the outline of Marinya. Beside them sat Mashko, calm and dignified, with the air of an English peer. At times, he spoke to Marinya. She turned to him, nodding her head approvingly.

“The Plavitzkis are here,” said Polanetzki, “we must go and greet them.”

“Where do you see them?”

“There, with Mashko.”

“Yes, true. Let's go!”

Marinya who was deeply and sincerely attached to Panni Bigel, greeted her husband very warmly, and nodding her head to Polanetzki very coldly indeed, began to converse with Bigel, inquiring about his wife and children.

In response to her question, Bigel invited her and her father to visit him the next Sunday in his country cottage.

“My wife will be very happy to have you call upon us,” said he. “Maybe Panni Chavastovska will arrive by that time!”

Marinya attempted to decline, pleading home duties as her excuse; but Plavitzki, who was not averse to taking an outing now and then, and knowing that Bigel lived well, accepted his invitation for himself and daughter without a moment's hesitation. They agreed to come in time for dinner, and leave the same evening. This was very easily accomplished, as Panni Bigel's cottage was near the railway station.

"In the meantime, sit down beside us," said Plavitzki.
 "There are luckily a few vacant chairs left."

"Have you any news from Emilya?" asked Polanetzki before sitting down.

"I was going to ask you the same question," replied Marinya.

"No. I received no word from her. I am going to telegraph to-morrow, inquiring about Lida's health.

The conversation was interrupted. Bigel seated himself at Plavitzki's right, Polanetzki beside Bigel. Marinya turned once more to Mashko, so that Polanetzki could only see her profile, and not very distinctly at that. He imagined that she had grown thinner, or at least after a week's sojourn in the city her face had paled considerable and become softer, her features more delicate, which made her lashes look longer and throw a more expressive, wider shadow. Her whole figure, thanks to her well-fitting costume, had gained, if possible, in stateliness and liteness. Her hair, too, was combed differently. Before it had been gathered and pinned in plain country style, now it was arranged in the latest fashion, half hidden by the stylish hat. Polanetzki devoured her with his eyes, marveling at her exquisite beauty and simplicity of manner, visible in everything, even in the way she held her hands. In short, he now more than ever before thought her a most beautiful creature.

"Oh, for such a wife! Only such a wife!" But she continued to address Mashko, and did it with a vengeance. Had Polanetzki been calmer and more composed, he would have thought that she acted in accordance with a preconceived plan; that she wished to annoy him. It looked that way. Their conversation, however, seemed very animated, for on her face from time to time the crimson appeared and vanished.

"She simply flirts with him!" thought Polanetzki, gnashing his teeth.

He attempted to overhear their chatter. This was very difficult. During the long intermission the crowd was noisy; and Polanetzki, who sat two chairs apart from Marinya, could not hear her; or, if he did, it was only a word, a phrase disconnected, without meaning. Mashko's

voice was more distinct. After the end of each selection played by the band, Mashko spoke earnestly, emphasizing every word, as if wishing to attach to it the greatest possible weight and importance.

"I love him," said Mashko. "Every man has his own weak points. His—is the love for money. I am very much indebted to him, for he persuaded me to buy Kremen . . . and, besides, I honestly believe, he wishes you well . . . He showed no mercy, and, I confess, in that he aroused my curiosity."

Marinya said something in reply, then Polanetzki heard the end of Mashko's answer:

". . . Not a developed character yet. He may possess less intelligence than energy, but he has a very kind, generous nature."

Polanetzki understood very well that he was the subject of their conversation, and he recognized the tactics of Mashko, whose favorite pastime it was to treat condescendingly and often even impartially his acquaintances, nay, even lavishly praise them before mutual friends, and at the same time deny them their real advantages as to character and social standing. Thanks to this strategy, he elevated himself to the position of an experienced judge and occupied a desirable lofty pedestal. But Polanetzki was also convinced that Mashko's object was not as much to humble and belittle him, as to install himself in the good graces of his lady, and would have handled without gloves any other young man he deemed a dangerous rival for the lady's affections. It was the kind of strategy which Polanetzki himself might have adopted, but it did not prevent him from making a vow to pay Mashko in the same coin, at the very first opportunity. Toward the end of the concert he noticed that Mashko played his rôle of suitor for Marinya's hand with a great deal of skill. When Marinya, in order to put on her veil took off her gloves and they fell to the ground, Mashko picked them up hastily and held them, together with her parasol, until she was ready to go. A moment later, when the crowd with noise and laughter left the garden, he gallantly relieved her of her cape to hand it to her again at the gates of the garden. In short, he was all absorbed in his attentions

to her, though he preserved his dignity of a worldly man familiar with the laws of etiquette. He seemed absolutely satisfied with himself and perfectly happy.

Marinya, having exchanged a few words with Bigel, spent the rest of the evening rapturously listening to the music and conversing with Mashko. On leaving the garden she walked ahead of her father, and Polanetzki could only catch a glimpse now and then of her smiling face, turned toward the lawyer. While talking, they looked into each other's eyes. Marinya's face showed animation, and her attention seemed to be riveted to Mashko's words. Indeed there was no more room for doubt, she flirted with Mashko; although Polanetzki, with all his wide-awake observing mind, would not admit that it was all done for his own special benefit. A carriage awaited the Plavitzkis at the entrance to the garden. Mashko helped the old man to enter it, then tenderly assisted Marinya, and after they were both made comfortable began to take his leave. But Marinya, leaning out, and looking down at Mashko, said:

"How's that? I thought papa invited you to come with us? Did you not, papa?"

"Yes, it was so agreed between us," replied Plavitzki.

Mashko took his seat in the carriage, and, nodding to Bigel and Polanetzki, the trio rapidly vanished from view. The two partners walked on for some time in silence. At last, Polanetzki, trying to seem composed, coolly said:

"I am curious to know what these two are at present; groom and bride, or not?"

"I do not believe they are so at present," replied Bigel, "but it will certainly come to that before long."

"I can see that much myself."

"I thought Mashko would look for a fortune as the main attraction in choosing a bride, but he seems to be smitten—in love, head over ears. You understand, of course, that this may happen even to an adventurer. . . . Yes, Mashko is in love, and will ultimately marry the girl. This union means an exemption from further payments for Kremen. And let me assure you that the deal is a good one, more profitable than it looks to be

at first sight. The girl is pretty. . . . What is true, is true." . . .

He paused. But Polanetzki felt so miserable that he waited not for his friend's further argument. He said impatiently:

"I must say candidly that the very thought that she will marry him is tormenting, tantalizing me . . . and I am helpless. I am willing and ready to endure anything, but not this helplessness. What a comical, ridiculous part, indeed, I have played in this affair!"

"You made a false step, which happens very often to all of us. The whole trouble arises from a coincidence of circumstances. Had you not been their creditor, for instance. . . . Your own opinions in such matters are so radically different from theirs. . . . You are like beings of two different planets, and, as you see yourself, a misunderstanding is always lamentable, but possible. Of course, you acted rather too harshly. You were too severe at the beginning; yet I cannot help thinking that, under the circumstances, no one else could have been less severe, with all consideration due the young girl. In making concessions, your motive would necessarily have been understood to be inspired by her. Is it not true? And what would have been the result? It would have looked as if she helped her father to entangle you in their meshes, and rob you of your own. No, that affair had to be settled." . . . Bigel paused for a moment, meditated for a short time, and then resumed: "As to your future conduct, there is but one way left: you must forget them all, let things take their own course, and say to yourself that everything is being shaped just as you wished it."

"What good will that do me?" exclaimed Polanetzki in despair. "Misery," they say, "loves company." "When a fellow's unlucky, everything goes wrong with him. Naturally, when a man is so stupid as to make trouble for himself nothing can get him out of it. All my life, ever since I became conscious of my own acts, I knew just what I wanted; but this time I acted as if ignorant of my own aim and purpose."

"This is a passing stage—it will soon be forgotten."

"But until it is forgotten life loses all its pleasure. Do you really believe that I torment my brain puzzling over the questions whether I shall be well or ill, rich or poor? The very thought of the future is disgusting to me. You are firmly established, and your ties of life are strong. But what about me? There were bright prospects—they are gone . . . gone forever. This discourages a fellow exceedingly, makes him drop his weapons and give up the struggle."

"But there is more than one woman in this world!"

"Only one! If there were another, the other would claim my attention. That's what makes me miserable, that she is the only one. In a year from now a slate may fall from the roof and crush my skull, or I may find another charmer and marry her, but the morrow is still a secret page to me. What I am conscious of—very much so—is, that anger gnaws at my heart. It all joins issue to-day with other grievances previously accumulated, and chokes me. If, in our outer life, we need a quiet, peaceful place of rest, how much more do we need that peace in our inner life? There it becomes a necessity. I postponed the search for that place until marriage should create new conditions of life, and a new way of thinking. Before beginning a new business, one must finish satisfactorily the old. But here everything is becoming so chaotically tangled up that the threads are not only invisible, but are tearing apart, threatening ruin and destruction. Scarcely does anything appear before it vanishes. At present I am living in a constant state of uncertainty. That is why I would give considerable to be a married man, everything would then be disentangled and brought into proper shape."

"I will tell you something," remarked Bigel, thoughtfully, "when I was a child, it was much easier and a good deal safer to draw out the splinter that pained me, than to leave this work to some one else."

"You are right there," agreed Polanetzki, and, after a pause, added: "But you see the splinter can be much easier taken out if the wound is not deep, and one can get hold of it with his nails. But how can you make this comparison? You never lose anything by getting the

splinter out of your finger. In my case the wound will smart, and with the splinter disappears forever my prospects for the future."

"'Tis true; but what can you do?"

"For him, who is not helpless, it's rather hard to agree to this conclusion."

The conversation was here interrupted, but when the two friends parted, Polanetzki said to Bigel: "Do you know, I think it's better for me not to call upon you on Sunday. You know why?"

"Yes, you'd better not," replied Bigel.

CHAPTER XI.

ON his return home Polanetzki found a telegram from Panni Chavastovska, which read: "Will arrive to-morrow morning. Lida is well." The home-coming of Panni Chavastovska was unexpected, or at least sooner than expected; but as the telegram indicated that Lida was well, Polanetzki perceived that his friend returned to Warsaw for the express purpose of attending to his love affair, and his heart was filled with gratitude. "That is an honest nature," thought he; "that is real friendship."

With this feeling of gratitude a ray of hope pierced his gloomy thoughts, as though Panni Chavastovska possessed a magic wand or ring, with the aid of which she could gain the love of Marinya for him. He did not know exactly how such things were accomplished, but he knew that one sincere devoted friend might plead for him, praise his heart, and character, and thus nip in the bud the prejudices planted by the strange course of events. He calculated that Panni Chavastovska would stoically defend him, and consider herself in duty bound to solve this knotty problem. A man in trouble often seeks another upon whom to place the responsibility for his own afflictions. In moments of despair it seemed to Polanetzki that Panni Chavastovska was much to blame for his present state of mind, and his relations to Marinya. Had she not shown him Marinya's letter in which the girl's secret was laid bare, from which he learned that her heart was ripe for love, he would have found strength to suppress his feelings, to banish her from his thoughts. Indeed, that letter may have been the cause of it all. In the history of his varying moods and emotions, it played a prominent part; it showed him in all its reality how near he was to happiness, and how deep into his soul penetrated the blue eyes that betrayed a yearning to entrust into his care her heart and soul. But for the letter and the facts

it disclosed, Polanetzki might have regretted the past with a stronger heart, might have grown accustomed to his position. He forgot that he insisted on having the letter shown to him, and considered it her duty, aside from his friendship and gratitude, to intervene for him, and come to his aid. To be sure, he understood that it would all arrange itself in the most natural way, as he hoped to meet Marinya under the most favorable conditions for himself, in a house, where he was beloved, where his friendship and devotion were highly appreciated. This helped to strengthen his hopes. Having decided at first not to avail himself of the opportunity to see Marinya on Sunday at Bigel's, he altered his decision, thinking, that if their health permitted, Panni Chavastovska and her daughter would also participate in this little outing. This possibility was a source of new rejoicing. He would feel perfectly happy to see around him the beloved faces of Panni Emilyya, and Lida, who had heretofore been the only love in his lonely life.

The same evening he wrote to Plavitzki, informing him of the arrival of Panni Chavastovska. He was confident that Marinya would be pleased and grateful for this bit of news. Then he notified the people in charge of the widow's house to have everything in readiness for her arrival, and engaged a landau. At five o'clock the next morning, Polanetzki was at the depot. The morning was damp and cold, and he paced up and down the pavement in front of the depot with big strides, waiting for the arrival of the train. At this early hour there was not a soul at the depot except the attendants, but gradually passengers and friends of arriving passengers began to gather. Suddenly, among the incoming people, Polanetzki espied two figures that looked familiar to him. His heart began to throb faster; they proved to be Marinya and her maid, who came to meet Panni Chavastovska. Polanetzki hastened to greet them. Not expecting to see her so early, he was somewhat confused. She was also astonished. But Polanetzki quickly regained his wits, and, holding out his hand, said:

"Good-morning! The day promises to be fair. I wonder if our fair passengers will arrive."

"Why, is there any doubt as to their coming?" asked Marinya.

"No, they will come this morning. Still something unexpected might have occurred. It always does. I received her telegram last night and notified your father at once, judging that you would be delighted at the news.

"Thank you. This is a pleasant surprise for me."

"The best proof of it is that you are up so early."

"Oh, this a habit I acquired in the village. I've had no time to get rid of it."

"We both came a little too early, I fear. The train is due here in half an hour. I advise you not to stand still but to walk around. The morning is chilly, although it gives promise of a warm day."

"The fog is dispersing," said Marinya, raising her blue eyes—eyes that seemed to Polanetzki violet-like in their blue purity.

"Do you wish to take a walk along the platform?"

"No, thank you. I prefer to remain in the waiting-room."

And bowing she went inside. Polanetzki continued to pace the pavement. He was disappointed at her refusal to walk with him, but explained it by the fact that it was altogether too uncomfortable outside for her. However, he was more than content at the thought that the return of Panni Chavastovska had already given him an opportunity to see Marinya, and it promised a good many more meetings on which he staked his hopes for the future. A peculiar energy and a new source of joy crept stealthily into his heart. He thought of her violet eyes, of her face flushed with the morning air, and passing by the window of the waiting-room, where Marinya sat, he muttered to himself, almost gaily: "Hide yourself, hide yourself from me, my dearest, but I shall find you, that I will."

Suddenly the big bell at the depot rang, and a few moments later, in the mist, the faint outline of the approaching train could be seen, which became more distinct as it drew toward the station. At length, the train, enshrouded in thick columns of smoke and escaping steam reached the station. Polanetzki was the first to jump into the sleeping car; for the first face he detected at the window

was that of Lida. At the sight of Polanetzki, her face beamed, as if lighted by a bright ray of the sun, and she began to wave joyously her thin hands, calling him, and in an instant he was at her side.

"My dear little pussy," exclaimed he, grasping her hands, "have you slept well? Are you well?"

"I am well, and back again! we'll be together now, and how are you, Pan Stach?" Behind the girl stood her mother. Polanetzki pressed his lips to her hand and spoke hurriedly.

"How do you do! I have a carriage waiting for you, and you can leave the depot at once, my valet will take care of your baggage, only let me have your checks. Tea is awaiting you at home. Let me have the checks—so. Panna Plavitzka is also here.

Indeed, Marinya waited outside, and both friends with beaming faces and smiling lips exchanged affectionate greetings. Lida gazed at Marinya, as if wavering, and knowing not whether to bid her good-morning, and then threw herself into the latter's arms with her old childish affection.

"Come with us for tea, Marinya?" asked Panni Chavastovska. "They are waiting for us, you surely have had no breakfast yet. Did I guess it?"

"But you are tired; worn out by an all-night's journey."

We slept soundly from the very minute we crossed the frontier. We had plenty of time to sleep, and arose refreshed and strengthened. At any rate we intend to partake of tea, and you will not be in our way, I assure you."

"Then I am coming with pleasure."

At that instant Lida tugged at her mother's dress.

"Mamma," she said, "and Pan Stach?"

"Of course, my dear, Pan Stach comes along. He was very thoughtful and made all arrangements. Thanks to him we will find our home ready for our reception. He must come with us."

"He must! He must!" echoed Lida, addressing Polanetzki.

"He must not, but he wants to," said Polanetzki, teasing his little pet.

In a moment all four were seated in the carriage. Polanetzki seemed at his best. Opposite him sat Marinya, beside him—Lida. He imagined that the morning light penetrated his soul and made him feel so gay, so happy ; that for him there came the dawn of better, happier days. He felt that from to-day on he would belong to that small circle of people joined to each other by ties of friendship, that in this circle Marinya would be the central figure. There they both sat, so widely apart from each other, yet so near, thanks to the warm friendship they both felt for the Chavastovskas. The four friends chattered merrily.

"What happened, Emilyya," asked Marinya, "that you hastened your departure from Reichenhall?"

"Lida implored me daily to return home."

"Don't you like to live abroad?" inquired Polanetzki, of Lida.

"No."

"Were you homesick for Warsaw? pining for the old place?"

"Yes."

"And for me? Eh? tell me frankly, or it will go bad with you."

Lida glanced at her mother, then at Marinya, then again at Polanetzki, and added :

"Yes, and for you!"

"Then, this is what you get!"

And Polanetzki seized her little hand and wished to kiss it, but she resisted and defended herself the best she could. At last she succeeded in liberating her hand, while he turned to Marinya, and laughingly showing his strong, white teeth, said :

"We always fight, but we make up and love each other none the less."

"It's always thus!" replied Marinya.

"Oh, if it were so, indeed, with all of us!"

Polanetzki looked straight into Marinya's eyes, as if waiting for an answer.

Panna Plavitzka blushed slightly, became serious, and not replying to Polanetzki, turned her attention to the widow, commenced talking with her. In the meantime Polanetzki asked Lida :

"Where is Vaskovski, my pet, did he go to Italy?"

"No, he remained in Chenstohova, and will be here the day after to-morrow."

"Is he well?"

"Yes."

The little girl looked critically at Polanetzki and added:

"But you are not Pan Stach, you look bad. Does he not, mamma?"

"Indeed, you look bad," confirmed Panni Chavastovska.

They were both right. He had changed considerably from the loss of sleep. The cause of his insomnia was facing him in the carriage. However, he explained that this change was caused by increased labors in his office. At last, the carriage halted before the house of Panni Chavastovska. While the latter with Lida was busy receiving and extending greetings to her servants, Polanetzki remained alone with Marinya. After a short and awkward pause, he asked:

"Have you a nearer, a better friend than Emilya?"

"A nearer, a better friend does not exist."

"Yes, you are right. Life demands a certain self-abandoning kindness. She is *very* pleasant, very winning and kind. I, for example, who have no family, nor relatives, consider her home my own, and Warsaw looks differently to me, when she is in the city."

He stopped, then added:

"This time my pleasure at her return is intensified by the assurance that you will join our circle, which will become for us all very dear." His eyes gazed at her appealingly, as if they wished to say to her in so many words: "I cannot live without you! Give me your hand, be good to me, mar not the pleasure of this beautiful day."

But she, just because she was not indifferent to him, made no advances to meet him half-way. And the more he evinced his good will, the more he became sympathetic, the more his former actions appeared to her ridiculous, impossible, the more the insult heaped upon her hardened her heart towards him. Of a timid and tender nature, she

felt that her answer to that silent appeal might spoil the perfect harmony of the day. Therefore she preferred to say nothing. But he needed no reply. He read it in her eyes:

"The less you will endeavor to correct and atone, the more our strained relations will improve. They'll be the best, if you'll put distance between us."

In a moment the light of his joy lost its luster. Anger and regret took possession of his heart. Gazing at her tender, kind face he felt that with every passing moment she becomes dearer to him, as well as inaccessible and lost forever. The entrance of Lida put an end to his moment of torture. The child ran into the room, her hair dishevelled, joyous and smiling. At the sight of the silent couple, she suddenly stopped, and let her large, blue eyes wander from one to the other, then, without a word, she sat down at the table where tea was to be served. Her gay manner changed instantly, although Polanetzki crushed the pain that gnawed at his heart, and endeavored to be lively and talkative. But he addressed Marinya no longer. He chatted gaily with Lida and her mother, and strangely enough—Marinya somehow felt that this was unkind to her. That it was meant as another rebuke, another insult. The next day Panni Chavastovska and Lida were invited to spend the evening with the Plavitzkis. Polanetzki was also invited, but did not come. This again stung Marinya to the quick. Such, apparently, is human nature. Anger, chagrin, as well as love, demands the presence of the person with whom you are angry. The whole evening Marinya had her eyes on the door, and when finally the hour arrived, when she could no longer expect Polanetzki, she began to flirt with Mashko, and in such vigorous manner, that Panni Chavastovska was exceedingly astonished.

CHAPTER XII.

MASHKO was a very capable man, but also very vain and self-confident. He saw no reason why he should not regard Marinya's smiles and other proofs of good will as the genuine article. True, her flirtation and the sudden change in her conduct did not escape his notice, and somewhat disheartened him. That alone, however, was not sufficiently strong to prevent him from taking a decisive step. Bigel's presumption that Mashko was in love, was true. Long before his purchase of Kremen, Marinya's blue eyes found their way into his heart. He liked her exceedingly.

He considered the matter carefully, pro and con, and finally came to the conclusion that "pro" held the balance on the scales.

Mashko keenly appreciated the power of wealth for which he struggled and schemed, but gifted with a sober mind, and knowing his own position in society, he was convinced that his efforts to wed a very wealthy girl would be futile. Girls with large dowries were to be found either among the aristocracy, which shut its doors against him, or in the financial world, which in turn longed to rub its shoulders against men possessing titles or noted pedigrees. And no one knew this better than Mashko himself, that the painted prelates and knights on his walls, that served Bukatzki as a target, could not open for him the doors of the fire-proof safes of the bankers. And then his very profession of a lawyer would, in the eyes of the stout financiers, merely be a *diminutio capitis*. Beside, he felt a natural, aye, even a sort of social repugnance toward unions of such character, whereas well-bred girls had their certain charms so dear to a parvenue. Panna Plavitzka had no dowry, or if she had, it was too insignificant to be worth considering. But to marry her meant to gain freedom from all obligations involved in the

purchase of Kremen. There were other advantages. To get the bulk of the local nobility's *clientele* was his old-time ambition. This would be realized by his entrance into the family of Plavitzki whose connections were rich and distinguished.

The Plavitzkis, like the rest of the country gentry, had relatives more or less distant whom they persistently ignored. But they also had such into whose exclusive circle they were never welcomed. This was prompted on either side, not by pride but rather by the fact that each and every one chose his friends more or less equal to himself in his condition of life. However rare, family reunions were certain to bring together the rich and the poor; cement over for a time the almost severed ties of relationship. And Mashko anticipated, not without a proud joy, that his wedding would be witnessed by some of the richest noblemen, whose friendship and confidence he hoped to cultivate in the future. Naturally all depended upon his own ability to make a favorable impression, to convince them that it would not only be proper but also beneficial to themselves to intrust their affairs into the hands of a noted lawyer, one of their own class, one of their relatives. This would be a valuable dowry by itself, which they could easily afford to give to their kinswoman. Mashko was morally certain that he could win them and finally conquer them. He knew that at first they would call upon him for legal advice as to an intimate friend or old acquaintance, who accidentally knows a thing or two in that line. Then when his advice had proven beneficial, they would come more frequently, and at last, become his clients. Thus, helping others, he would climb to high ground himself, clear Kremen of its encumbrances, and in time bid farewell to the law, toward which he felt no particular sympathy, which he considered merely a means to reach his goal, to gain a firm foothold in social spheres, as an independent man, as a representative of a large fortune.

All this he foresaw and considered, before he determined to propose to Marinya.

One thing he overlooked; he had not believed himself capable of loving Marinya so ardently as he did. At

first, it set him wild. He thought that passion destroys the equilibrium, which every member of the highest society must know how to preserve. This equilibrium was one of his illusions, one of his mirages. Had he not been forced to knock at the door of this society, or in other words, had he been born there, he would have allowed his heart full sway. Notwithstanding all his talents, he was not alive to the fact that one of the few privileges of that world that considered itself the most favored one by men and fortune, was its freedom.

He was, therefore, far from delighted that his heart melted and gave away at the sight of Marinya. On the other hand, the very goal he was striving for received every day a new and brighter shade of happiness, a bliss that often intoxicated him.

Mashko had lived over thirty years without knowing the meaning of the words exaltation, enthusiasm. Now he was aware for the first time how much beauty, how much bliss there was in those words, for his soul was filled with enthusiasm for Marinya. At times, when the guest of Plavitzki, Mashko's thoughts were so occupied with Marinya in her retreat in the room adjoining, that he understood Plavitzki's words with difficulty. When she entered, there sprung up in his heart soft and tender feelings, which made him seem better, nobler than he really was. His eyes betrayed him. The flush on his cheeks which reminded his friends of Vaskovski, became brighter, his whole figure lost its unnatural affectation, and when he let his fingers wander through his side-whiskers, he did it not like an English lord, but like a common mortal sadly in love. He was so much in love, so completely smitten that if unsuccessful in his suit, he might have become a dangerous man, from a moral standpoint, the more so that he was indeed a very positive, energetic man. He had never known what love was before.

Marinya was the first to awaken within him all that was capable of loving. She was not a universally acknowledged belle, but she possessed the charm of womanliness, which like a magnet drew to itself the most energetic natures. In her tender features there was something similar to a clinging plant. Her face was calm and serene, her eyes

were transparent, her mouth somewhat thoughtful. All this at the first meeting did not produce a very strong impression. But in the course of time the most indifferent man noticed in her some peculiar feature, something which he could not help loving and admiring. At last, to complete the description, the more Mashko felt improved morally, influenced by Marinya's presence, the lower went the spirits of the latter. Since the day she came to Warsaw the loss of Kremen left a void in her soul. Deprived of her work she lacked an aim in life. To add to her discomfort the late events piled upon her many a grievous burden, which finally became sore wounds of the heart.

Marinya herself was conscious of it, and a few days after the evening on which Polanetzki failed to make his appearance, she was the first to touch upon the subject to Panni Chavastovska. They were seated together in the twilight, in the room adjoining Lida's.

"I notice," said Marinya, "that we are not as sincere with each other as we have been. I wished to speak to you frankly, but could not sum up the courage. It seems to me that I am no longer worthy of your friendship."

Panni Chavastovska drew nearer to Marinya, bent her pretty head and kissed her girl-friend on the temple.

"Oh, Marinya!" exclaimed she reproachfully, "and you say that! you—always so thoughtful and composed?"

"I say it, because I was more worthy in Kremen than I am here. You cannot imagine how deeply attached I was to that spot. There I cherished the hope that time would bring for me some happy and blissful event. It is all gone and lost now. I feel lost in this Warsaw and cannot find myself, and, worse than all, I cannot find my former frankness and sincerity. I noticed your astonishment at my flirting with Mashko. Do not say that you saw nothing. Do you believe, I fully understood myself, why it was done? I have now become meaner, angry with myself, with him, with the entire world. I have no love for him, and shall never marry him, and therefore acted dishonestly, which I confess with shame. There are moments lately when I desire to offend, to hurt somebody. You must cease to be my friend, and sever all our connection, for I have changed, indeed, and for the worse."

Tears rolled down Marinya's cheeks. The young widow began to pet and caress her like a child.

"Mashko," said she, "evidently courts you with a preconceived plan, and I felt sure you were at least in sympathy with his intentions. I will now admit to you frankly that I was sorely grieved, because he is not for you. But, knowing your fondness for Kremen, I thought that you chose this means of becoming its mistress again."

"Indeed, I entertained this idea for some time, and I wished to assure myself that I liked Mashko. I did not want to repulse him. I thought of another, but also of Kremen. But I could not quite convince myself. I do not want Kremen at such a price; but here is just where the dishonesty is shown. Why do I deceive him, give him false hopes? It's dishonest; it is —."

"Yes, I agree, it is not right that you encourage and deceive him, but I believe I can understand why you do it. It is to avenge the wrong and insult heaped upon you by another. Is it not true? But comfort yourself, my dear, if only with the certainty that the wrong can be repaired. You can even to-morrow change your conduct toward Mashko. And you must do it, Marinya, before it is too late, before you promise him anything. I know it all, Marinya, I understand it."

"But you see, when I am with you and meditate and ponder, as before, as a truthful and honest girl, I feel that not only my words, but my actions bind me. He might tell me this."

"Your reply must be that you wished to find out if you loved him, but you found you couldn't. At any event this is your only escape."

A moment of silence ensued. Both friends felt that they had not referred yet to the subject they were both eager to discuss, at least something that was of great interest to Panni Chavastovska. Taking her hand, she said slowly: "Now, admit, Marinya, that you flirted with Mashko because you felt slighted by Stanislav."

"I do," answered Panna Plavitzka.

"Does it not mean that the impression received the first day after his arrival in Kremen, and your subsequent conversation did not leave your mind?"

"Would they were forever banished from my thoughts!"

"You cannot believe, dear, what a good, what a sympathetic, noble man he is! I say it not because he is friendly to us. True, he loves Lida, and for this I am grateful to him with all my heart and soul; but you know that this kind of affection is not generally very deep nor very warm—merely a summer feeling. But even in this he is an unique exception. Judge for yourself: when Lida was suddenly taken ill in Reichenhall he sent for a famous physician from Monachium, assuring us that the doctor was called for another patient. He advised me to avail myself of this rare opportunity and let the physician pass his opinion on Lida's case. You see how thoughtful Polanetzki is, how loving. He is a man one can rely upon—energetic, truthful. There are men more intelligent, but they lack his energy; there are others possessing plenty of energy, but no delicacy of feeling. He is gifted with both. I forgot to tell you what a great help my brother found in Polanetzki when Lida's small fortune was scattered and he attempted to save it. Had Lida been of age, I know of no man I'd sooner trust her future with than Polanetzki. I cannot mention half the kind things he did for me and mine."

"If they were as many as the injuries he has done to me, they were very many indeed."

"No, Marinya, he did not want to do it. Ah, if you only knew how he suffers for his error, how sincerely he admits his guilt!"

"He told me as much himself," replied Marinya. "I, my dear Emilyya, have thought of it very much, and to tell the truth, I do not find that he is in any manner guilty. He was so kind when in Kremen. Only to you I will say, and I have already written to that effect, that on that Sunday evening he spent with us I went to bed my head and heart filled to overflowing with such beautiful thoughts and feelings that I am really ashamed to admit it. . . I felt that if he were to linger with us another day I would love him for the rest of my days. I imagined that he, too. But he departed the next morning in an angry mood. . . My father was to blame. So was I. I readily understood it, and you remember

the contents of the letter I wrote to you at Reichenhall. He went away, and I know not why. I thought that he would come back to me, that he would write. Something within me told me that he would not take Kremen away from me. He did. And then I know that Mashko was frank with him. But he urged Mashko to buy his claim: he insisted that I never entered his thoughts. . . Ah, Emily! He may not be to blame, but how much grief he has caused me! It was his fault that I lost not only the nest I loved, the place I worked in, the place of my birth, but something more important—my faith in life, in men; my faith in the common conviction that all nobler and better things in this world must perforce be given a higher place than the low and the vulgar ones. I am becoming wicked. I do not recognize myself. Of course he had the legal right to act as he did. Very well then. I understand it and lay no blame at his door. And yet, . . . he shattered within me a life-spring which it will be almost impossible to repair. How would you have it done? What is it to me that he regrets his act and is ready even to marry me? What is it to me that I, who almost loved him, not only do so no longer, but must defend myself against the feelings of contempt and hatred that creep stealthily into my heart. Had I been simply indifferent to him it would not have been so bad. I know what you wish me to do. But, my dear, one must build her life on love, not on hatred. How can I offer him my hand with the conviction constantly tormenting me that, whether guilty or not, he was the cause of so much grief, so many broken hopes, so many bitter feelings? You might think I am not aware of his fervent wooing. But what can I do if the more I see him the stronger grows the aversion he inspires? And if I had to choose between him and Mashko, the latter would be my choice, although, as a man, I think much less of him. I agree with all the good things you say in his favor, but to one and all my reply will be: "I love him not, and never will."

The eyes of the widow filled with tears. "Poor Stanislav!" she uttered to herself, and then, after a pause, inquired: "And you are not sorry for him?"

"No. I am sorry for him whom first I saw in Kremen. My sympathies are with him when I don't see him. . . . But meeting him. . . . I feel towards him nothing but dislike."

"Because you don't know how miserable he was in Reichenhall. Now he suffers more intensely. He has no one in the world."

"He has your friendship and Lida's love."

"Oh, that is another thing! I am grateful from the depths of my heart for his attachment to Lida, but this is absolutely a different thing altogether. . . . You comprehend it very well yourself, I hope, that he loves you a hundred times more than he does Lida."

The room by this time was perfectly dark, but soon a servant brought in a lighted lamp and set it on the table. By the light of the lamp Panni Chavastovska accidentally noticed a white object lying on a sofa near the doors leading into her daughter's room.

"Who is there? Can it be Lida?" asked the alarmed mother."

"I, mamma!" replied the child."

There was something peculiar, unusual in her voice. The mother rose and went hastily to her.

"When did you come in here? What ails you?"

Panni Chavastovska sat down on the sofa, and drew her little girl to her breast. She noticed tears in her eyes.

"What is it, my Lida—were you crying? What is the matter with you, my child?"

"I feel so sad, so bad, mamma."

And pressing her head to her mother's breast, she wept bitterly. She was made miserable by the thought that her "Pan Stach" was even more wretched than he was in Reichenhall, that he loved Marinya a hundred times more than he loved her. The same night when going to bed she whispered into her mother's ear:

"Mamma dear, one great sin lies like a stone upon my soul."

"My poor darling! What sin torments my innocent little dove?"

And the little girl lowered her voice: "I do not love Marinya!"

CHAPTER XIII.

PANNI CHAVASTOVSKA, Lida, Marinya, and Plavitzki were going to dine with Bigel in his cottage in the forest, within two and a half hours ride from the city. It was a warm September day. The trees still retained their fresh green leaves, although here and there some red and yellow tints were to be seen. This pale and golden-hued autumn day reminded Marinya of her village life, of the odor of grain in the granaries, of the fields and meadows symmetrically covered with stacks of corn and hay, which winding for a considerable distance were lost among the alder trees. Her heart pined for that quiet life, in comparison with which the city seemed to her a nest of idlers, notwithstanding the life that teemed within it, a life she could not harmonize with. Now she knew that that life in which she found her joy, and which knew her worth, was lost to her forever; and she saw nothing before her to compensate her for that loss. It was in her power to return to all that was dear to her—as the wife of Mashko; but at the very thought of it, grief rent her heart, and Mashko, with his self-admiration, his flushed cheeks, his side-whiskers, and aping the manners of an English lord—became to her hateful, detestable. Never before, as at that moment, had she felt so wronged by Polanetzki, who had bereft her of Kremen and sent Mashko to her instead. For the first time she felt an instinctive abhorrence to the latter. She pictured to herself her life with her father on the pavements of Warsaw, without aim or purpose, without work, without an ideal, with a regret for the past, and emptiness staring at her in the future.

Thus, instead of this balmy autumn day quieting her, it made her gloomy and dejected. The journey was not a merry one for all participants. Lida sat quiet like a mouse, her pretty face dark and without its usual sweet

smile because her Pan Stach was not with her. Her mother was all attention, fearing, watching for symptoms of a new attack.

Plavitzki alone of the little group feeling at ease, was gay and talkative. Dressed in his immaculate black suit and light overcoat, his moustaches skillfully curled upward, he deemed himself perfect, as far as good looks went. The anticipated attack of rheumatism to which he was subjected was not present to mar his happiness, and he felt strong and vigorous. To add to his cup of bliss, beside him sat the most beautiful woman in Warsaw, who, he hoped, could not remain indifferent to his beauty, and would duly appreciate it. And indeed, he was captivating, from his own point of view: he was so versatile, so full of various moods; now he was absolutely swollen with his own dignity, now cunning, then fatherly affable and kind. Asserting that the youth of our day were not polite enough to the fair sex, he almost spent himself in dancing around Panni Chavastovska, drew from dust-covered mythology for complimentary comparisons, which was partly in place, for he looked upon the young widow as would a satyr. But all his compliments and flatteries were received with a faint smile and were left unheeded, which evidently had the desired dampening effect. He took offense, and switched around to other subjects. He dwelt at some length upon the fact that his daughter having formed acquaintances with certain people, he was obliged to recognize the *bourgeoisie*, at which he rejoiced at the end. He had seen such types of individuals and societies before only on the stage. In real life, however, one must come in contact with all sorts of people, as one may learn something even from them, and he came to the conclusion, that men of a higher caste are in duty bound not to turn the cold face to persons of lower grades; but on the contrary win their good will, thus spreading among them the seeds of healthy principles of life. As a man who always fulfilled his duties toward society, he would not shrink now before such a noble mission, but act hand in hand with the rest. Thanks to this determination his dignified face had assumed a most melancholy expression, when they approached Bigel's cottage.

This cottage was built in the heart of a pine forest, not far from a row of other dwellings, surrounded by large old pine trees that mysteriously shook their tops. They marveled at the presence in the midst of the former stillness of the woods, of this new, pretty cottage. They sheltered it, however, in the most hospitable manner, from the gusts of wind, and, when the sun shone brightly, filled it with a balsam-like odor of their needles and gum.

The entire Bigel family came forward to meet their guests. Panni Bigel, who dearly loved Marinya, extended to her a hearty welcome, apparently hoping to win her favor for Polanetzki. She thought that the longer Marinya would move in their circle, and discover that she was at home there, the less difficulty there would be to manage her. Plavitzki, who made Bigel's acquaintance during his first visit to Warsaw at the house of Chavastovska, and limited his recognition of the fact to the sending in of his card, now played the part of an amiable prince, as only a highly-bred man could perform it, fulfilling his mission of capturing the "bourgeoisie." He kissed the hand of Panni Bigel and to her husband said, with a condescending smile: "At the present time any man should be delighted to find himself under the roof of a man like you, sir; but it is a double pleasure to me, because my cousin Polanetzki adopted the business profession and is at present your partner."

"Polanetzki is a clever man," simply said Bigel, shaking Plavitzki's gloved hand.

The ladies went inside to rearrange their dresses, and soon returned to the veranda, the day being warm.

"Polanetzki has not arrived yet?" asked Panni Chavastovska.

"He arrived here this morning," replied Panni Bigel. But he went to pay his respects to Panni Kraslavski. She lives not far from here," added she, turning to Marinya, "not more than two miles distant. There are many cottages in the vicinity, but the Kraslavskis are our nearest neighbors."

"I remember Theresa Kraslavski from the time of the carnival," said Marinya, "she was always so pale."

"She is quite pale even now. Last winter she spent in Pau."

In the meantime Bigel's children, fond of Lida, took her along for a ramble around the cottage. The little girls showed Lida their garden built among the pines, where it seemed nothing could take root and grow save the pines themselves. The boys also participated in the fun: at first they attacked and demolished the beds of Georgina, selecting for Lida the choicest flowers, then they quarreled over what games Lida loved best, and ran to have their troubles settled by Panni Chavastovska as judge. Edy, who always spoke in loud tones, closing his eyes while he argued, began to yell:

"I say that Lida likes ring-toss best, but I don't know whether she has your permission to play the game."

"Yes, if she does not run, which is not good for her."

"No, we will not run. We will throw our hoops so that she may catch them where she stands. And if Yuzia can't do it, let him throw it to some one else."

"I, too, want to throw my hoop to her," wailed Yuzia.

And at the thought that he was to be robbed of the pleasure he pouted his lips. But Lida averted the tears by saying: "I will throw mine to you, Yuzia, very often; I will, indeed."

And the moist eyes of Yuzia beamed and he smiled triumphantly.

"They will not slight the boy," remarked Panni Bigel, addressing the widow. "But how strange! my boys are such dare-devils generally, but look how cautious they are now—how they love your Lida. We owe this to Polanetzki; it is his education of the youngsters that accomplished it."

"Oh, your children are very lovely, they have few equals in the world," said Panni Chavastovska.

At the same time the children gathered in a group to pick out their hoops and sticks. In the midst of the merry party stood the tallest and oldest of them, Lida. And although Bigel's children were considered pretty, yet Lida, with her delicate poetic countenance, seemed among them a being from another planet. Panni Bigel's attention was attracted by the scene.

"Look," said she, "a real queen. I cannot take my eyes from her."

"Such a noble face," added Bigel. Panni Chavastovska gazed with loving eyes upon her only child.

The little ones scattered over the square and finally took their positions forming a large circle, and on the dark background of the pine-needles looked like multi-colored spots, and in comparison with the tall trees above them as small as flies. Marinya stepped down from the piazza and took her position at the side of Lida to help her catch the rings, and thus save her from exhaustion. At this moment in the broad forest path leading to the cottage appeared the manly figure of Polanetzki. At first the children did not notice him, but he, casting his glance toward the house, espied the light dress of Marinya and quickened his pace. Lida, knowing that her mother dreaded her slightest fatigue and unnecessary exertion, knelt on the ground motionless, catching only those rings that came within her grasp. Marinya, however, ran with the others. As the result of this running to and fro, her hair loosened and became dishevelled, so that she halted every moment to put it in order again. At the moment Polanetzki entered the gates she stood there flushed, with her hands on her hair. He did not take his eyes from her. In this large yard she seemed to him younger and smaller, and looked so virgin-like, so feminine and attractive, as if created to be pressed to one's heart as the most precious being in the world.

Seeing him the children dropped their rings, and with whoops and yells rushed to meet him. The game was forgotten. Lida rose to her feet and wanted to join her little friends, but suddenly halted, looked with her large eyes first at Marinya then in the direction of Polanetzki.

"Don't you want to run and greet Pan Polanetzki?" asked Marinya.

"No——"

"Why?"

"Because——"

The child blushed crimson. Apparently she could not or dared not express her thoughts, which could be framed

in these words: "because he loves you more, because he has eyes only for you."

In the meantime Polanetzki drew nearer, defending himself from the children and saying: "Let me go, little devils, or I will crush you all with my big feet."

He extended his hand to Marinya, looking at her almost pleadingly, begging for a friendly smile. Then he turned to Lida: "Ah, my little kitten—How are you?" And the child, forgetting at the sight of him the pangs of her little heart, put both her hands in his, and said: "Oh, yes, I am well—yesterday Pan Stach did not come to us—I felt lonesome,—and now I must bring you to mamma for punishment."

A moment later they were all grouped on the piazza.

"How are the Kraslavskis?" inquired Panni Chavastovska.

"They are well and getting ready to come here after dinner," replied Polanetzki.

About noon, just before dinner, Vaskovski arrived bringing with him Bukatzki, who had returned to Warsaw the previous night. Thanks to his friendly relations with Bigel he came when he pleased, without waiting for a special invitation. The presence of Panni Chavastovska was too great a temptation for him to resist. However, he greeted her without sentimental effusions, joking as was his custom. She was also delighted to see him, for he amused her with his original and peculiar way of expressing his views.

"You intended to go to Monachium and Italy?" she asked when all the guests took their seats around the table.

"Yes," replied he, "but I forgot in Warsaw my paper knife, and I came back."

"Oh, that is a weighty reason!"

"It often bores me to discover that people act always in obedience to 'weighty reasons.' What a monopoly have those 'weighty reasons,' that every one of us must submit to them? And besides, I accidentally paid a last debt to my friend Lisovich by witnessing his funeral."

"You mean that small, thin sportsman?" asked Bigel.

"Yes, and just imagine. I have not until this very hour recovered my senses from the astonishment of how

that man, who played the clown his whole life-time, could pick up courage enough to die. I simply fail to recognize my Lisovich! At every step now-a-days a man meets with deceptions."

"To-day Panni Kraslavski informed me,"—interrupted Polanetzki, "that Ploshovski, the idol of all Warsaw belles, blew his brains out in Rome."

"He was my relative!" remarked Plavitzki. This last bit of news affected Panni Chavastovska more than the rest. She did not know Ploshovski personally, but had met him several times at his aunt's. She knew of the old woman's great affection for her nephew.

"God! what a misfortune!" exclaimed she.

"But is it true? so young, so capable,—rich. Poor Panni Ploshovzki!"

"And what a large estate was left without an heir!" added Bigel. "I know them well for they lived not far from Warsaw. The old maid, his aunt, had two relatives. Panni Krovitski—a very distant relation, and Leonti Ploshovski. They are both dead now."

The last words put new life into Plavitzki. He was indeed, related to the old Ploshovski and met her two or three times during her life-time. But after each meeting he retained only a recollection of dread, for the old maid at each interview bluntly told him some bitter truths about himself, or to put it stronger, handled him without gloves. He avoided meeting her again, and thus their relations were severed, though on favorable occasions he loved to brag of his connection with that rich and noted family. He belonged to that class of people so numerous in our part of the country, who are firmly convinced that God created them for the sole purpose of growing rich and fat on legacies,—a class that deems expectation for such legacies quite proper,—and their collection a necessity. Plavitski solemnly said:

"Maybe God in His wisdom has decided that all their wealth shall pass into other hands that will make a better use of it."

"I also met Ploshovski once, abroad," remarked Polanetzki, and he impressed me as an extraordinary man. I remember him now, very well."

"He was such a nice, sympathetic man," added Panni Bigel.

"God have mercy on his soul!" said Vaskovski, "I knew him myself. He was a true Aryan."

"An Azoryan," corrected Plavitski.

"An Aryan," repeated the professor.

"An Azoryan," said Plavitski with dignity, emphasizing each word.

The two old men looked at each other in confusion, knowing not that they argued to the great delight of Bukatzki, who, fixing his monocle, asked:

"Well, how is it, professor: an Aryan, or Azoryan?"

Polanetzki cleared the mystery by explaining that Azorya was the escutcheon of the Ploshovski family. He was therefore both Aryan and Azoryan. Plavitski, however, would not consent to this explanation. He insisted that a man with an old, spotless name, has no right to be ashamed of it, and deny it.

Meanwhile, Bukatzki turned to Panni Chavastovska and began to converse with her in his usual frigid tone.

"Only one form of suicide is pardonable, namely, suicide committed by a man sorely disappointed in love. This cause nearly drove me to suicide: I thought of it for many years—in vain!"

"They say that suicide is cowardice," said Marinya.

"That is just why I don't commit suicide: I am too brave."

"Let's talk of life—never mind death. Think of life and of the best there is in it. I drink your health, Panni Chavastovska!" concluded Bigel.

"And Lida," added Polanetzki, then he turned to Marinya and added: "I drink the health of our two friends."

"Thank you!" said Marinya.

Polanetzki lowered his voice, and continued: "You see, I consider all those around me not merely my friends, but——, how shall I express it to you?—defenders—protectors. Lida is a child yet, but Panni Chavastovska surely knows whom she may or may not honor with her friendship. This is to prove that, were there anybody, with a prejudice that was just, to lay the blame at my door for acts committed rashly and thoughtlessly, he

would have to take into consideration that I could not be very bad, after all, if Panni Chavastovska protects me with her wings of friendship."

Marinya was somewhat taken aback, and confused, but she was sorry for him when he added, in a still lower voice: "And I am indeed suffering, for I am ill at ease." . . . But before she could answer Plavitzki offered a toast, drinking to the health of the hostess, making a lengthy speech, the essence of which was that a woman was a queen, and being a queen she has a right to expect all men to bow to her will, wherefore he always revered women in general, and to-night Panni Bigel especially. Polanetzski in his soul wished him to choke, for it robbed him of the one dear word Marinya might have uttered. He felt that that moment would not return again, as Marinya rose to kiss the hostess, and, returning, did not renew the conversation, while he dared not request an answer.

Soon after dinner the Kraslavskis came: the mother, a woman about fifty, lively in her movements, self-confident and talkative; the daughter, a perfect contrast, yellow, dry, cold, a pale though pleasant face, reminding one of Holdbein's Madonnas. Polanetzki began to entertain her, stealing from time to time a glance at Marinya, at her fresh, healthy face, her blue eyes, and even said to himself: "Oh, you cruel thing! If she would say only one kind word!"

He lost his good humor more and more, and when Panna Kraslavski addressed her mother "memme," instead of "mamma," he rudely asked, "How did you say?"

But "Memme" was busy unloading a basketful of gossip, news, and conjectures pertaining to the suicide of Ploshovski.

"Just think of it, gentlemen," said she with enthusiasm, "the idea just struck me that he shot himself because of his love for Panni Krovitski, peace to her ashes. She was a born coquette, and I detested her. She flirted with him so cruelly, so unceremoniously, that I was afraid to take Theresa along with me whenever I expected to be in their company. This is a bad example for a young girl. What is true is true. Theresa had no love for her, either."

"Ah, Panni Kraslavski!" indignantly protested the widow, "I have often heard that Panni Krovitski is an angel."

Bukatzki, who never laid his eyes on the lady in question, turned to Kraslavski and phlegmatically assured her:

"Madame, *je vous donne ma parole d'honneur*—she was an archangel."

For a moment Kraslavski was silent, knowing not what to say. Then she blushed, and was ready with a quick and harsh repartee, but she remembered that Bukatzki was reputed wealthy, and might be cultivated with some success for her Theresa. She also had her eye on Polanetzki, and, like a shrewd general, kept up her relations with the Bigels for the former's sake. At all other times she ignored the latter most shamefully.

"Then," said she at last, "you think every pretty woman an angel or an archangel? I abhor it, even when my own Theresa is concerned. Panni Krovitski might have been considered a very nice girl but for her lack of tact. That's all."

The conversation about Ploshovski was thus abruptly ended. The attention of Panni Kraslavski was, moreover, riveted most of the time on Polanetzki, who made frantic efforts to entertain her daughter. He did it to spite Marinya, and tried to persuade himself that it was a pleasant task. He even gave himself the trouble to try to discover in the younger Kraslavski charms unknown before, and finally did discover that she had a slender neck and somber eyes that lighted and beamed when they turned quickly towards him, which was frequently. He also detected that she could be a silent despot, for whenever her mother let her tongue loose or raised her voice a few octaves higher, she put the lorgnette to her eyes and looked at her fixedly, which soon produced a wonderful effect—Kraslavski senior lowered her voice or stopped altogether. Withal, Theresa bored him mercilessly, and if he stuck to his post, it was the work of despair. He hoped to awaken, at least, a slight shade of envy in the heart of Panna Plavitzki. Perfectly clever men often take refuge under such strategies when pressed to the

wall by strong emotions. Naturally, they often produce impressions just opposite to those they expect to create, and make reconciliation more difficult. At length Polanetzki longed so for Marinya that he would have willingly listened to some rude remark from her if it would have been the means of throwing them together and giving him an opportunity to address her. But it seemed more improbable now than an hour before. And he heaved a deep sigh when the evening was at an end and the guests prepared to depart. Lida approached her mother, encircling her neck with her tiny arms, and whispered something in her ear. Panni Chavastovska nodded her assent and walked up to Polanetzki. "If you have no intention of spending the night here," said she, "ride home with us. We will put Lida between us—myself and Marinya—and there'll be plenty of room for you."

"Very well. I cannot stay here over night, and am very grateful to you for the suggestion."

He guessed who was the author of ~~one~~ the project, and said to Lida:

"It's all your work, my dear little pussy!"

Lida, partly behind her mother, raised her sad, joyous eyes, and asked in a whisper: "Have I done—well, Pan Stach? Do you like it so?"

They were on their way home a few minutes later. After a beautiful day, came a still more lovely night, fresh and cool, light and silvery, with the faint gleam of the moon. Polanetzki, for whom the evening had dragged along dreadfully slow and uninteresting, breathed freely the balmy air, and again felt almost happy, seeing before him two women he loved,—and a third he adored and worshipped. By the pale light of the moon he saw that face, and it looked to him serene, kind and tender.

Lida sank into the depths of the seat and apparently slumbered. Polanetzki covered her with a shawl, taken from her mother for the purpose, and they rode on in silence. At last Panni Chavastovska broke the silence. She spoke about Ploshovski, the news of whose untimely death shocked her.

"Yes, indeed, there must be some sad drama in that unhappy affair," remarked Polanetzki, "and Panni Kraslavski

may be partly right, asserting that these two deaths, following one another so rapidly, have some connection between them.

"This suicide is horrible, for the very fact that we condemn it," said Marinya. "And such condemnation creates the impression that we have no feeling in the matter, have no sympathy for the unfortunate."

"Our sympathy is best employed when lavished on those who are still among the living," replied Polanetzki.

Again the conversation ceased for some time. It was renewed by Polanetzki, who pointed out a house with light in its windows, lost in the heart of the park.

"This is the villa of the Kraslavskis."

"I cannot forgive her for what she said of that unfortunate Panni Krovitski," said the widow.

"She's a horrid woman, and do you know why? She slanders, she reviles for the sake of her daughter. The old woman sees in the whole world a large back ground, which she wants to paint black, so that her Theresa may be outlined to the best advantage. Perhaps, years ago, she counted on Ploshovski as a possible victim, and considered Panni Krovitski a dangerous rival. In such a case her hatred toward the dead girl is understood."

"The younger Kraslavski is a charming girl," said Marinya.

"There are people, for whom beyond the world of comradeship, begins a new world, more spacious, more attractive. With her nothing begins, or rather, nothing ends. She is a perfect automaton, in which the heart will beat only when her mother winds it up with her key. Such girls in this world are not rare. There are many, who, seeming different, are often just of this type and character. The old story of Galatea. You will not believe that with this doll, dull and gloomy as a candle, a friend of mine, a physician, fell desperately in love. Twice he proposed to her and each time she rejected him, because the Kraslavskis aimed at better game. Then he entered service in Holland, and probably died from fever; at first he wrote quite often, inquiring about this automaton. Then the letters ceased to come.

"Is she aware of it?"

"She is. I spoke to her several times about it. What is most characteristic of the girl is that the recollection of him who loved her never for a moment cast its shadow upon her face. She spoke of him indifferently as of any other man she knew. If the poor devil hoped that his memory would be cherished after his death, he was sadly mistaken. I will show you some day one of his letters. I tried to bring the fellow to his senses. His response was: 'My judgment of her is sober, impartial. Still I cannot tear my heart away from her.' And he was a skeptic, a positivist, a child of our day. It appears, however, that true emotions laugh at philosophies. Everything passes—passions remain. He also expressed this sentiment in a letter: 'I'd rather be miserable with her than happy with another.' What can you add to this? The man judges her soberly, impartially, but cannot tear his heart away from her, and that ends the matter."

"And whoever gets into trouble," concluded Polanetzki after a long pause, "must bear his cross patiently."

Panni Chavastovska bent over her daughter.

"Are you asleep, my kitten?"

"No, mamma, dear," answered Lida.

CHAPTER XIV

"I AM not avaricious and money is not my idol," said Plavitski, "but if God will grant in His mercy that a crumb, a part, of that fortune, should pass into our hands, I could not and would not object. I do not need much. Very soon four planks and the warm tears of my child for whom I lived will be sufficient. But this question involves Marinya.

"Allow me to draw your attention to the fact," coldly remarked Mashko, "that first your claims are not substantial, not solid."

"But I believe they can be taken into consideration."

"Second. Panni Ploshovski is still alive."

"But that woman is crumbling away, turning into dust even now. She's as old as a dry mushroom."

"Third. She may will her fortune to charitable institutions."

"We can contest such a will, can we not?"

"Fourth. Your relationship is too distant. In like manner, everybody is related to everybody in Poland—we're all relatives."

"But allow me. She has no nearer kin."

"Is not Polanetzki your relative?"

"God forbid! He's some relation to my first wife, but not mine, not a bit."

"And Bukatzki?"

"Bukatzki is a cousin of my brother-in-law."

"And you have no other relations?"

"The Goutovskis of Yabrijikow claim to be, but you know people always lay claim to what is for them most flattering. I have no desire nor motive to recognize Goutovski."

Mashko purposely invented new obstacles to be able afterward to show him a glimpse of hope. After some meditation, he began: "People in our part of the country

are very eager for legacies of some sort or another. At the first smell of one they gather in multitudes like crows over carrion. In such cases it often depends a good deal on who'll compromise first, with whom and through whose agency. Do not forget, pray, that an active, enterprising man, who understands his business thoroughly, can often get something out of nothing, while a man without energy, without knowledge of the affair in question will do the opposite—nothing."

"I know this myself. I've had experience. I spent my life in litigations of various kinds, and am weary of it. It's like a poison."

And Plavitzki pointed to his throat.

"Besides," added Mashko, "You run the risk of being victimized by sharks, lawyers, who will bleed you for the rest of your days."

"I rely on your friendship . . ."

"And you will not regret it. I feel a warm sympathy for you and your daughter, and consider you as near relations."

"I thank you in the name of the orphan," replied Plavitzki. He could not utter another word from visible emotion.

Mashko also grew serious and continued :

"But if you wish me to defend your interests, even in case your claim is not altogether valid, you must give me a power of attorney, give me the right to do so."

The lawyer grasped Plavitzki's hand.

"Of course, you know, what I am alluding to, and I beg you to listen to me patiently to the end of my story."

Mashko lowered his voice, and though there was no one else in the room, began to speak slowly, earnestly, with perfect assurance, as a man who under no circumstance forgets who he is and what he represents.

Plavitzki listened, at times closed his eyes, shook Mashko's hand, and finally said :

"Please step into the parlor. I will send Marinya thither in a moment. I know not what her answer may be, but let God's will be done. I always esteemed you highly, and now value your friendship still more. Here! . . ."

And Plavitzki opened his arms into which Mashko fairly jumped, though he quickly controlled his excitement, and said with dignity:

"I thank you! I thank you!"

In a moment he was in the parlor.

Marinya entered the room pale, but composed. Mashko gave her a chair, sat down himself, and began to speak:

"I am here with the permission of your father, and tell you nothing new, nothing that has not been unfolded to you by my silence, by my glances, which I hope, you understood. But the time has come when I must speak of my feelings, and I do so with the fullest confidence in your heart and character. Before you now sits a man, who loves you, who is to be relied upon, who places at your feet his whole life, and begs you to go with him hand in hand through the journey of life."

Marinya did not answer immediately. She hesitated a moment, as if considering her reply, then slowly said: "I must say that your confession affects me very much, unpleasantly. I do not desire, however, that a man like you should be deceived in his hopes. I did not love you, I do not now, and I shall never be your wife, even if I have to remain an old maid to the end of my days."

Again they were both silent. Mashko's cheeks flushed a deeper red, and his eyes shot a cold steely glance.

"Your reply is as decisive and final as it is sudden and painful to me. But do you not wish, before rejecting me forever, a few days more time to consider the matter carefully?"

"You said yourself that I had divined your feelings. I must have had plenty of time to think of it often; my answer is decisive and final."

Mashko's voice now became dry and sharp.

"And do you think," said he, "that your conduct has given me no right to propose to you, as I have?"

Mashko was certain that Marinya would deny the allegation, that she would insist he misunderstood her, that there is nothing in his personality that would tempt her to give him hope, in short, that she would beat around the bush, the favorite method of coquettes, when pressed hard, but she gazed at him for a second, then simply replied:

"I confess that my behavior towards you was not always what it should have been, and I most humbly and sincerely beg your pardon."

Mashko was silent. A woman who dodges, who will not face the truth, wins contempt in the eyes of a man. But she who confesses her guilt, snatches the weapon from the hand of any one in whose heart a single spark of noble generous feeling is still smouldering. Besides, the only way to touch a woman's heart is to generously overlook her fallacy.

Mashko did so. He saw before him a yawning precipice, but he decided to stake everything on his last card. Though every nerve of his wounded vanity trembled within him, he made a superhuman effort to control himself, and approaching Marinya, kissed her hand.

"I knew," said he, "that you dearly loved Kremen, and I bought it to place it at your feet. I see now, that I did not chose the right path, and therefore will turn backwards, though God knows how bitter it is to me to acknowledge defeat. In view of these events, I must beg your pardon: You were not to blame, but I. Your peace and serenity is dearer to me than my own happiness, and I humbly entreat you to grant me only one favor, not to reproach yourself in the least. Now, permit me to bid you good day." He took his departure.

Marinya sat a long time alone, pale and disheartened. She did not expect such noble conduct from Mashko.

Thinking the matter over, she thought bitterly: "One took away Kremen from me in order to get his own. The other bought it to return it to me." Polanetzki lost considerably by the comparison. Marinya gave no heed to the fact that Mashko bought Kremen not from Polanetzki but from her father, that he bought the estate for mercenary reasons of his own, that he intended to return it, hoping to come into immediate possession of it again, together with her heart and hand. Kremen after all, was not taken away from her, it was sold by her father because he found at last a purchaser. But her's was a woman's logic, and her comparison of Mashko and Polanetzki elevated the former and lowered the latter. Mashko's gentlemanly conduct affected her sensitive mind to such an ex-

tent, that had she not felt an instinctive repugnance for the man, she would have called him back. There was a moment, one brief moment only, when she deemed it her duty to do so, but she lacked the courage.

Naturally she little suspected that at that moment Mashko descended the stairs with despair and rage alternately gnawing his heart. Before him, indeed, an abyss, deep and hideous, opened its jaws. His calculations were all wrong. The woman he loved, scorned his offer, and the more she tried to soften the blow, the more he felt humbled and insulted. All his past undertakings were successful. He was fully conscious beforehand of his own power.

He believed not in failure. Marinya for the first time shook this self-confidence, and the shock almost prostrated him.

For the first time in his life he doubted his own ability, and felt that his star was on the wane, that this failure might be the beginning of the end. Other thoughts followed in quick succession. Mashko bought Kremen on reasonable terms, but the estate was too heavy a burden for his limited means.

Marinya's consent would have proven a salvation. Plavitzki's annuity, the snug sum to be paid Marinya for her share in Magyerovka, would have been saved. They were becoming due now, together with the claim of Polanetzki and other debts. The interest charged by the usurers threatened ruin. True, he still had credit, but it could be exhausted, and snapped like a string. Mashko knew that with the first mishap to that string, he was doomed forever. His dread for the future, his disappointment and regret for a happiness that might have been his, filled him with rage and a craving for vengeance. He was a man of energy and grim determination, trained to pay for insult with insult, wrong for wrong.

Mashko ground his teeth, and clenched his fist. "If you are not mine," murmured he, on his return home, "I will never forgive that insult. If you are mine, I will avenge it, anyhow."

After Mashko's departure Plavitzki entered Marinya's room.

"You must have sent him home a disappointed, wretched man," said he, "or else Mashko would have come to me for congratulations."

"Yes, papa, I declined the honor. . . ."

"Gave him no hope for the future?"

"Not the least, papa, although I respect him very highly, indeed, yet I could not. . . ."

"What did he say to you?"

"All a man of his noble character might say."

"A new blow! God knows whether you have not robbed me of my bread in my old days. However, I might have known, that you would not take this into consideration."

"I could not act otherwise, papa, dear."

"I do not blame you, nor is it my intention to compel you to go against your heart's dictation. I will now go where every tear of an old father is seen and recorded by the Almighty."

And he went to Lour's to watch the billiard players. He was not averse to the idea of becoming Mashko's father-in-law. The lawyer, however, occupied not a very lofty place in Plavitzki's estimation. He knew that Marinya could make a still better match, and thought little of the matter.

Half an hour later Marinya knocked at her friend's door.

"At last, one stone has fallen from my heart," said she to Panni Chavastovska, "I refused to become Mashko's wife."

Panni Chavastovska, without a word, embraced Marinya.

"I am sorry for him," continued Marinya. "He acted so nobly, so delicately as only a man of his stamp could, and were I capable of having the slightest sympathy for him, I would bid him come back this very day."

And Marinya related her conversation with Mashko. Indeed, Mashko's conduct was spotless, and Panni Chavastovska marveled at that display of nobleness in a man she considered rash and rough, whom she did not deem capable of taming his violent nature in a crucial moment.

"I know, my dearest Emilya," added Marinya, "that you are devoted to Polanetzki, but compare these two men, not by their words, but by their acts and deeds."

"I will never make such comparisons," replied Panni Chavastovska. "How can I? In my eyes Pan Stanislav stands a hundred times higher and far above Mashko, and you judge him unjustly. You dare not say that one took Kremen away from you, which the other wished to redeem and return. It was not so. Polanetzki never took it away, and were he in a position to do so to-day, he would gladly return the property to you."

"Prejudice speaks through your lips."

"Not prejudice, but reality, which cannot change matters one jot."

Panni Chavastovska seated Marinya before her, and continued:

"You're wrong, Marinya, only reality and nothing else, and let me tell you, it is all because you are not indifferent to Polanetzki."

Marinya trembled as if some one had wrenched her wounded heart. After a pause, she said in a voice that betrayed great emotion:

"You are right. I am indeed not indifferent to him, but all my sympathy has turned into gall, into a burning feeling of shame and dislike. And, listen, Emilyya, were I to choose to-night between Mashko and Polanetzki, I would not hesitate a moment to give Mashko my hand."

Panni Chavastovska dropped her head in dismay. Marinya embraced and kissed her tenderly, then she continued:

"I am exceedingly sorry, dear, to cause you displeasure, but I must speak the truth. I know that you will cease to love me, and I will remain alone in the world, friendless."

Marinya's fears were, indeed, well founded, for though these two old friends embraced on parting, they both felt, when alone, that the ties that bound them together had snapped, that their relations henceforth would never be as cordial as they had been.

Panni Chavastovska hesitated several days before she consented to repeat to Polanetzki her conversation with Marinya. Polanetzki listened to her story with bowed head, and finally said: "I thank you, Emilyya. If Panna Plavitzki has nothing but contempt for me, it does not

prove that I ought to despise myself. You are aware, I trust, that if I erred, I did my utmost to atone for the wrong, and do not at present see that there is any blame attached to me. True, bitter moments are in store for me. However, I have never been a helpless man, and I hope to find sufficient strength and will power to banish from my heart, as useless, the feelings I entertain toward Panna Plavitzka. I most solemnly vow to do so."

"I believe you! But a man suffers so much at that?"

"It matters not!" almost gaily responded Polanetzki. "If my wound will smart and pain I will ask you to bandage it. When such tender hands as yours will perform the operation, the wound will heal up in a short time. Besides, Lida will also lend her helping little hand, and not a word of complaint will escape my lips."

Polanetzki departed, feeling refreshed, encouraged, with a new store of energy and will-power. It seemed to him that he would be able to tame his passion, to crush the feelings within him, as one breaks a cane over his knee. With this plan firmly decided upon, he spent several days, showing himself nowhere except at his office, in which only strictly business transactions were allowed to occupy his attention. He labored from morning till evening, banishing from his mind all thought of Marinya during the day. But through the long sleepless nights her image tormented him. He was conscious that Marinya could love him, could become his wife; that he could be happy with her and no one else; that he loved her as the most precious creature in the world. Remorse and regret did not leave Polanetzki for a moment. He grew thin and wasted. He discovered at last that the breaking and crushing of feelings means the crushing of happiness. He saw before him a void he could not fill. He recognized that one can love a woman not as she is, but as she might have been. He pined and grieved, but, controlling himself, avoided Marinya. He knew she spent most of her time with Panni Chavastovska, and he kept himself a voluntary prisoner in his own dreary rooms.

Only when Lida again became seriously sick, did he make his re-appearance at the widow's house, and spent there whole days with Marinya at the bedside of the sick child.

CHAPTER XV.

AND poor Lida, after another severe attack, did not improve. She lay motionless on the sofa in the parlor. The physician and her mother consented to Lida's request not to keep her confined to her bed. She loved to have Polanetzki and her mother sit by her, while she spoke of everything that chanced to enter her little mind. With Marinya she scarcely exchanged a word, gazing at her long and thoughtfully, she would raise her eyes toward the ceiling and ponder, as if wishing to find the solution to some question, or give herself a clear account of her own thoughts. Often such thoughtful moods came up on her when she remained alone with her mother. One afternoon she suddenly awoke, as if from half-conscious slumber, and turning to her mother, said:

"Mamma, dear, sit down by me, on the sofa."

The mother obeyed. The child embraced her mother, laid her head on her mother's shoulder, and in a faint, tender voice began:

"I, mamma dear, wish to ask you something—I know not how to express myself——"

"What is it, my little one?"

Lida was silent for a moment, as if collecting her thoughts, then she said:

"If you love some one, mamma, then what?"

"If you love some one, then what, my Lida?"

The mother repeated the question not grasping the object of her daughter in putting it, but the latter could not define it clearer, and again asked:

"Then what, mamma?"

"Then you wish that this some one should be happy, that life should be one round of bliss to him, and if woe befall him, you wish to suffer with him,"

"What else?"

"You wish to have him at your side constantly, as you are with me now; you wish that he loved you, as you love me, as I love—you."

"Now, I understand," replied Lida after some meditation. I thought myself it was something like that."

"Yes, my pussy, it is so."

"You see, mamma dear, when we were still in Reichenhall, you remember mamma? At Thumsee I heard that Pan Stach loved Marinya, and now I know that he is very unhappy, though he never speaks of it."

The mother fearing to excite the invalid, asked:

"Does not this conversation weary you, my pussy?"

"Oh, no, no! Now I understand. He would that she loved him, but she loves him not. He would she was with him, but she lives with her father, and refuses to marry him."

"To become his wife."

"To become his wife. He suffers, mamma. Is it not true?"

"Yes, my darling."

"I understand it all. And if she married him, would she love him then?"

"Yes, my pet—he is so good."

"Then, I know everything, now!"

The child closed her eyes, and it seemed to the mother, that her little patient-sufferer slumbered, but Lida, after a pause, continued:

"And if he marries Marinya, will he cease to love us?"

"No, my Lida. He will always love us!"

"But Marinya—most?"

"Marinya will then be nearer to him than we are. But why all these questions, my dear?"

"Are they bad?"

"No, not bad, but I fear these questions are exhausting you."

"Oh, no! I always think of him. Mamma dear, do not tell Marinya one word about it."

This ended the conversation with her mother. The succeeding days Lida was more silent than before, gazing at Marinya fixedly and steadily. At times she took her hand, and looked into her eyes, as if wishing to say—to

ask something. When Polanetzki was present her eyes wandered from one to the other, and then closed. They came every day to assist the mother in caring for the patient. Panni Chavastovska was still blind to the grave danger that threatened the child, for the physician himself could scarcely foretell when the disease would end, or how long the child would suffer. Of course he reassured the mother, at Polanetzki's request. However, gradually, notwithstanding the physician's protests, she noticed herself that the condition of the child was getting worse, and the mother's heart almost died within her from alarm.

And yet she made superhuman efforts to smile and seem in a merry mood, so as not to sadden the sensitive child. In similar manner acted Polanetzki and Marinya. But Lida studied them all so carefully, that the least expression of alarm on their faces, especially on that of her mother, did not escape her notice.

One morning, when Polanetzki, left alone with Lida, busied himself blowing up a globe made of silk taffeta, she turned to him and said:

"I see, Pan Stach, that mamma is awfully alarmed at my sickness."

Polanetzki stopped and replied:

"She does not dream of it. Who put that idea into your head! But then, it is very natural, that she should be alarmed, for we all prefer to see you well and merry."

"Why are all children so healthy. I alone am always ailing?"

"Healthy, indeed! Were not Bigel's children laid up a while ago with the croup? For several months the house looked like a hospital. Yuzia had the measles, the boy was awfully sick. It happens so, that children are always ailing."

"You're only saying it to —. They are sick, but almost always get well soon."

She shook her head sadly, and added: "No, this is something quite different. Here I am compelled to lay in bed, because my heart is beating so—so strongly. The other day I heard singing in the street, and I crawled up to the window. Mamma was not home. I saw a funeral procession, and I thought that I, too, will die soon."

"What nonsense you do talk, Lida," exclaimed Polanetzki, and resumed blowing up the globe, to conceal his agitation, and at the same time to show her how little heed he paid to the meaning of her words. But the girl followed the current of her own thoughts: "At times I feel so bad, and my heart is beating so fast . . . mamma said, that whenever it happens, I should pray to the Mother of God. I always do so, because I fear to die. I know that it is very good in Heaven, but there will be no mamma there, and I will lie in the cemetery, alone, and at night."

Polanetzki suddenly put aside the globe, sat down at the bedside of the sick child, and taking her hands, said: "Lida, my darling, if you only love mamma and myself a little bit, do not think of such matters. Nothing will happen to you, and in the meantime, if mamma discovers what torments your little mind she will grow alarmed. Remember that thinking does you harm——"

Lida crossed her hands.

"Ah, Pan Stach, I will think no longer. I only have one request to make."

Polanetzki bent over her:

"Ask, my pussy, only say no foolish things."

"Would you pity me much!"

"Ah, you little rogue!"

"Tell me, Pan Stach!"

"You are a bad child, Lida! You know that I love you, love you ever so much! God forbid!—I would regret no one's death more than yours—but you, pussy, be calm, and lie quietly, my dear little butterfly!"

And the girl raised to him her clear blue eyes: "Very well, I will be quiet! Good, kind Pan Stach!"

At this moment her mother entered. Polanetzki wished to take his leave, but Lida added: "And you are not angry at me?"

"No, Lida, I am not!" replied Polanetzki.

Going out from Lida's room into the ante-chamber Polanetzki heard a knock at the door: Panni Chavastovska did not wish to use the bell. He opened the door and let in Marinya, who usually came only at evening. Greeting Polanetzki, she said:

"Well, how's Lida to-day?"

"As usual——"

"Was the doctor here?"

"He was, but told us nothing new—allow me to assist you?"

He wanted to take off her coat, but she declined. Polanetzki, still under the spell of the conversation with Lida, suddenly and fiercely addressed her: "This was meant as a mere courtesy and nothing more, and even were it of a different character you might just as well on this threshold have forgotten your dislike of my humble self, for there lies here a dying child, whom we both love so well. In your refusal there is not a drop of kindness, not a bit of tact. I would offer to assist any other lady, and I wish you to know that at this moment I think of no one else but Lida." He said all this with such fire that Marinya, caught unawares, somewhat lost herself, and unwillingly allowed him to take off her coat, and not only failed to find strength enough to deem it a fresh insult heaped upon her, but she felt that only men deeply affected by grief could speak thus, men exceedingly kind and sensitive.

Maybe his sudden burst of spirit touched her vanity, suffice it to say, that Polanetzki at that moment touched her heart to the quick, more than at any time since their walk through the garden of Kremen.

She raised her eyes in astonishment towards him, and timidly uttered: "Pardon me."

Meanwhile he, too, controlled himself, and shamefully replied:

"It is I who beg your pardon. To-day Lida spoke to me of death and agitated me to such an extent, that I forgot myself. You will understand this and forgive me!" He pressed her hand and departed.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE following day Marinya offered to take up her residence in the house of Panni Chavastovska till the complete recovery of Lida. The widow was at last persuaded to yield. She was almost exhausted from constant attendance upon the child whom she did not dare to entrust to the care of a servant. Lida's condition demanded incessant watching, as the crisis was liable to occur at any moment, and it could not be expected that the most reliable nurse would not slumber just at the very moment when help would be necessary to prevent the death of the child. The presence of Marinya was therefore a God-send to the broken-hearted mother. As to Plavitski, he found more pleasure in dining in crowded restaurants than at home. Marinya made daily visits to their home to inquire about her father's health, and attend to their affairs. Thus Polanetzki who spent his leisure time at the widow's house was constantly face to face with his idol. She astonished him. The mother herself did not show so much loving care, could not attend to the needs and caprices of the patient as did Marinya. She became pale and haggard during the first week from sleepless nights and constant dread for the child's fate. Blue circles formed under her eyes, but her strength and energy seemed to grow daily, and she showed so much kindness, patience and generosity, so much tenderness in all she did for the child, that Lida, forgetting her former dislike of Marinya, became softened and less capricious, and during her absence, she waited impatiently for her return. At last the health of the child began to improve. The physician permitted her to arise, to walk up and down the room, and sit in her cushioned chair, which on sunny days was brought nearer to the door, so that she could see the street, and the carriages and pedestrians moving thereon. At times, the child became uneasy, and then thoughtful, at

other times her childish nature overcame that moodiness and she was amused by the October sun lighting up the roofs, walls and windows; the dresses of the women passing by. It seemed as if these powerful elements of life, pulsating in the city whirl, entered the dying spirit of the child and gave it a new lease of life. Often, peculiar ideas flashed through her mind. Once a wagon heavy laden with citron trees in barrels passed her window, the barrels were chained together, but still swayed to and fro with every motion of the wagon. Said the little girl:

"Their hearts do not beat."

Then she looked at Polanetzki and asked:

"How long do they live?"

"Some exist a thousand years."

"I wish I were one of those trees, mamma, what big tree do you like best?"

"A birch."

I would like to be a little birch, and you a big one, we would grow together, side by side. And Pan Stach would he like to be a birch?"

"If he only could grow near the little one!"

Lida gazed at him sadly, shook her head and said: "Oh, no! Now I know everything! I know at whose side you would like to grow!"

Marinya blushed in confusion, lowering her eyes to her work. Polanetzki began to pat Lida's head, repeating: "Ah, my dear little kitten,—my sweet darling!"

Lida was silent. Then from under her long and silky eyelashes two big tears rolled down her thin pale face. She raised her face beaming with heavenly joy, and quietly added: "I dearly love mamma, and Pan Stach, and Marinya. I love everybody."

CHAPTER XVII.

PROFESSOR VASKOVSKI made daily inquiries about Lida's health, and though he did not call, he always sent her flowers. Polanetzki, meeting him once at dinner thanked him in the name of Panni Chavastovksa.

"How does she feel to-day?" asked Vaskovski.

Tolerably well to-day, but generally bad, worse than at Reichenhall. Our fears increase with every passing and coming day.

"And when do you think that this child will be no longer?"

Polanetzki broke down; the words seemed to choke him, and wishing to overcome his grief, he began to curse fate: "What's the use thinking, hoping for mercy. Sober logic tells us, that people with diseased hearts are doomed to death! The devil take such life!"

At this moment Bukatzki entered the restaurant. Learning the subject of their conversation, and loving Lida, he, too, fell upon Vaskovski, indignant at the very thought that death was hovering around her.

"How can one willingly deceive himself during so many long years, and speak of mercy which crumbles into dust in the presence of blind destiny."

To which the old man meekly responded: "How can you, my dear lads, measure with your own yardstick the mercy and wisdom of God! Whoever entering a cellar, though he may be surrounded by darkness, yet he cannot say that above him there is no sky, no sun that shines so bright and warm!"

"There is consolation for you!" exclaimed Polanetzki. "From such philosophy flies lie low and perish. And what will become of the mother, whose only child is dying?"

But the blue eyes of the professor seemed to dwell on

another world. He looked fixedly into the distance, after which he spoke like a man who has seen something, but has his doubts about the clearness of his vision: "I think that this child is too much attached to life and humanity, and cannot pass away or vanish leaving no trace. There is something in her, she is destined to accomplish something, and she will not die before she fulfils her mission.

"Mysticism," muttered Bukatzki.

"If it were only so!" interrupted Polanetzki. "Mysticism or not, if it were only true! A man in danger grasps at the shadow of a dim hope. I never believed it that she could die."

"Who knows," added Vaskovski, "she may outlive us all."

Polanetzki was in a phase of skepticism, when a man recognizes nothing, believes in nothing, and only deems possible that which his heart at a given moment most ardently desires. He heaved a deep sigh. He felt somewhat relieved.

"God grant mercy to this poor woman! I would pay for a hundred masses if I knew it could do her good."

"Pay for one, but let your intention be sincere."

"I will, I will! And as regards sincerity, I could not be more so if my own life were at stake."

Vaskovski smiled ironically.

"You are on a good path," said he, "because you know how to love!"

They all felt easier at heart. Maybe Bukatzki held different opinions to those of Vaskovski, but he was loth to discuss them, for skepticism pulls its cap over its ears in the presence of people seeking salvation in faith in time of sorrow. Skepticism in such cases crows down, and seems to its own self small and insignificant. Bigel, who appeared on the scene, at sight of their almost gay countenances, said: "I read on your faces that the child is not worse."

"No, no!" replied Polanetzki, "But the professor has said things that have dispelled our clouds and soothed our wounds."

"Thank God! My wife to-day paid for a mass, after which she went to Panni Chavastovska. I am free,

accordingly, and as Lida is feeling better, I will tell you an amusing piece of news."

"What is it?"

"I met Mashko a while ago. He is coming here soon, and you can congratulate him personally. He is going to get married."

"Who is she?" asked Polanetzki.

"My neighbor."

"Panna Kraslavzki?"

"Yes."

"I understand!" remarked Bukatzki. "He crushed those ladies with his solemn 'magnificence,' his noble descent, his wealth, and from the fragments created for himself a wife and a mother-in-law."

"Tell me, pray, one thing," said Vaskovski: "Is Mashko a religious man?"

"As a conservator—for good form's sake."

"And those ladies?"—

"As a matter of habit."

"Why do they never think of their future life?"

"Mashko! Why don't you think of your future life?" asked Bukatzki of the entering lawyer.

Mashko approached them and asked:

"What did you say?"

"I said: Mashko, *tu felix, nube!*"

Mashko then received the congratulations of his friends with befitting dignity, and said:

"I thank you, dear friends, from the depths of my heart, I thank you; and as you all know my intended wife I doubt not the sincerity of your congratulations!"

"Don't you dare to doubt it!" interrupted Bukatzki.

"Kremen came handy, just in time, did it not," interrupted Polanetzki.

Kremen, indeed, was of great service, for without it his suit would have been rejected. But on this account the remark was unpleasant to Mashko, who frowning said:

"You helped me to come into possession of it, and I sometimes am grateful to you for it, and sometimes curse you."

"But why?"

"Because your uncle Plavitzki is the greatest bore on

God's earth, not mentioning your cousin, who is very charming, but from dawn till dusk puts Kremen through all modifications according to the best rules of grammar, and irrigates the whole with ample tears. You are a rare visitor there, but believe me, it is very annoying."

Polanetzki looked at him, and said :

"Listen, Mashko ! I handled my uncle without gloves, it is true, but this does not mean that I ought to listen to unsavory remarks from a man, who found in him a good paying proposition. I know furthermore, that Marinya exceedingly regrets the loss of Kremen, but this only proves that she is not a heartless doll, but a woman with feelings,—you understand me !"

Silence ensued. Mashko knew very well what Polanetzki was hinting at, when speaking of a heartless doll. The spots on his face grew a deeper red, and his lips twitched and trembled. But he controlled himself. He was not a coward, by any means, but the most courageous man often has an opponent whom he does not care to challenge. Such was Polanetzki for Mashko. He shrugged his shoulders and asked :

"Why this rage? If this is unpleasant to you——"

Polanetzki interrupted him.

"I am not angry. I only advise you to remember my words."

"Very well," replied Mashko. "I will remember your words, but I will also advise you never to allow yourself to speak to me in such manner again, or I will remember this, and some day demand an account."

"But what are you two about?" exclaimed Bukatzki,—
"why do you quarrel?"

But Polanetzki, in whom rage against Mashko had been boiling for a long time would certainly have continued matters further, but for the sudden appearance of Panni Chavastovska's servant, who rushed in panting.

"Pan Polanetzki," cried he, out of breath. "Lida is dying."

Polanetzki grew pale, and finding his hat rushed toward the door. Again silence reigned, which was finally broken by Mashko.

"I had forgotten," said he, "he must be forgiven now."

Vaskovski, covering his eyes with his hands, began to pray, then muttered :

“ God alone can save her ! ”

A quarter of an hour later Bigel received a note from his partner containing the following :

“ The crisis has passed. ”

CHAPTER XVIII.

POLANETZKI fairly flew to Panni Chavastovska's house, fearing that he might be too late. The servant informed him on the way that he left Lida in convulsions, almost dying. On entering the house he was met by the widow herself, who shouted to him: "Better, better!"

"The physician is here?" asked Polanetzki.

"Here."

"And the child?"

"Asleep."

The face of the mother still betrayed the struggle of fright with hope and joy. Polanetzki noticed that her lips were pale and bloodless, her eyes red and her face spotted. She looked worn out, for she had had no sleep for twenty-four hours. The physician, a young energetic man, thought that the danger was passed. Panni Chavastovska was put perfectly at ease when the doctor, in the presence of Polanetzki, declared the crisis passed. "We must not allow another one to come, and it will not!" Evidently the doctor deemed it still possible to prevent the recurring of the attack, but at the same time this was a warning that the next crisis would also be the last, bringing agony and death. Panni Chavastovska caught at every thread of hope, however thin, as a man falling down a precipice catches hold of slippery plants growing over its sides. "We'll not let it come! We'll not let it come!" she repeated feverishly, pressing the doctor's hand. Polanetzki cast a side-glance at the doctor, wishing to learn whether his words were pronounced to allay the mother's fears, or merely based on his medical experience. Then he asked: "You will remain with her to-night?"

"I fail to see the necessity," he replied. "The child is exhausted, and will certainly sleep long. You must also

rest awhile, the danger is past. The patient must see only smiling faces when she awakens."

"I'll not fall asleep," said the mother.

The doctor raised his pale-blue eyes, looked at her steadfastly, and as if with an effort, he slowly said:

"In an hour you will go to bed. You will sleep uninterrupted six—eight hours. We'll say—eight; and tomorrow you'll arise fresh and perfectly calm; and now I'll bid you good-night."

"And how about the drops if the child awakes?"

"The drops will be administered by somebody else. You must and shall sleep. Good-night."

The doctor took his leave. Polanetzki intended to follow him and inquire about Lida, but fearing that a long conversation with the physician might alarm the widow, he resolved to call upon him the following day at his residence, and there obtain all the desirable information.

Having remained with Panni Chavastovska, he said:

"Do as the physician advised and retire. As to Lida I'll keep watch and not leave her bedside through the night."

But all the thoughts of the poor mother hovered around the sick girl, and, instead of replying directly, she said:

"You know that after the previous crisis she fell asleep. She has asked for you several times. She has also inquired about Marinya, but fell asleep with the question: 'Where is Pan Stach?'"

"My poor girl! I would have come myself after dinner—I ran as fast as I could. When did the crisis begin?"

"About noon; but since morning she was sad, as if she had a presentiment. Don't you know, in my presence she always claims to be healthy; but this time she evidently did not feel well at all. Before the attack she sat down at my side and begged me to hold her hand. Yesterday—I had forgotten to tell you—she asked me very strange questions: 'Is it true that a sick child is always granted the favor it asks?' I replied: 'It's true if the request can be fulfilled.' Probably some thought was tormenting her little head, for in the evening, when Marinya came, she repeated the question in her presence and then went

to sleep in a merry mood. Only in the morning she complained that something was choking her. Fortunately I had sent in time for the physician; he arrived just before the crisis."

"But it's still more fortunate that he left with the conviction that the paroxysms will not recur again. I am persuaded that his conclusion is right."

Panni Chavastovska reverently raised her eyes and said:

"God is merciful! He will spare me!" and, notwithstanding all her efforts to remain firm, she burst into tears. The long-suppressed grief and despair gave way to joy and found an outlet in tears. In this noble inspired nature the calm reason was always affected by an inborn exaltation, which prevented her realizing the real state of affairs. Thus she did not in the least doubt that Lida's disease had come to an end with this last paroxysm, and that from now on the child's life would not be darkened by ill health.

But Polanetzki would not and probably could not stop between despair and grief. His heart was filled with his passion for her, and he felt how profoundly attached he had become to this exalted and ideal woman. If she had been his sister he would embrace and press her to his heart, but as it was, he contented himself with an affectionate pressure of her hand and said:

"Thank God! Thank God! Now you will go to sleep, and I'll be with Lida and shall not stir till she awakes."

Lida's room was dark, as the shutters were closed and the sun was setting; only a few purple rays penetrated through the narrow openings, soon to vanish altogether as the sky became darkened. Lida was fast asleep. Polanetzki sat down by the bed and gazed steadily at her face. His heart ached. Lida was lying upon her back, her face turned to the ceiling; her thin hands resting on the blanket, her eyes tightly shut. Her paleness, which seemed almost waxen in the reddish semi-darkness of the room, the half-opened lips and the deep sleep, gave to her emaciated little face a tranquil appearance which death alone imparts. There was not the slightest rustling of the lace with which her night-robe was trimmed, nor twitching of

the body, however slight, to prove that the child was alive and breathing. For a long time Polanetzki gazed at the sickly face, and once more the feeling, frequently experienced by him when thinking about himself, asserted itself: that he was created to be a father, that, together with a chosen woman, children could constitute the ideal of his life, the chief aim and reason of existence. He understood all this, thanks to his compassion and love for Lida, who, although only a friend to him, was at this moment as dear as his own child.

"If she were given to me," he thought, "or if she were deprived of her mother, I would adopt her and then I would have something to live for."

He also thought that if he could form a covenant with death, he would unfalteringly offer himself up in order to save this child, over whose head grim death was hovering, as a ravenous bird over a helpless dove. Yes, this man could now kiss the hands and the head of the poor child with more passion than the average woman could manifest.

In the meantime it became dark, and soon after Panni Chavastovska appeared holding a little lamp with a pink shade and obscuring the light with her hand.

"Asleep?" she asked in a whisper, putting down the lamp on a small table which stood behind the head of the bed.

"Yes," answered Polanetzki in a whisper.

The mother looked at the sleeping girl.

"Do you see," Polanetzki rejoined, "how regular and calm her breathing is. To-morrow she'll be well."

"I hope so."

"Now the mother's turn to sleep has come. It's time already, or, really, I'll quarrel with you."

The young widow smiled gratefully. In the pleasant bluish light of the night-lamp she appeared angelic, so much so that Polanetzki involuntarily thought that she and Lida were really two celestial beings who were accidentally lost in this world.

"Yes," she said, "now I will rest. Marinya Plavitzka and Professor Vaskovski came, and Marinya absolutely insists on remaining."

"So much the better. She is a skilful and patient nurse. Good-night."

"Good-night."

Polanetzki was again alone, and Marinya now became the object of his thoughts. At the first inkling that she would be in the room in a minute he could think of nothing else. He asked himself why it was he did not fall in love with Panni Chavostovska, undeniably more beautiful than Marinya, more pleasant, more lovable. Why should he love that girl, who, in his estimation, stood inferior to the gentle Chavastovska, and whom he also knew less? The approach of Marinya produced in him all those ardent impulses that a man feels at the sight of his chosen one, while Panni Chavostovska impressed him in the same manner in which a beautiful painting or sculpture does. Why is it that the more cultured the man, the more sensitive his nerves, the more refined, the more impressionable he is, the stronger appears to him the contrast in womankind. But Polanetzki could not find a better answer than the one given to him by the physician, who fell in love with Kraslovski. "My reasoning about her is rational, but I can't pluck her from my heart." Certainly this was no solution of the enigma. It simply reaffirmed its existence, but he could ponder no longer over it, as Marinya now came in the room.

They silently nodded to each other. He took a rocking-chair and noiselessly moved it to the bed, inviting her to be seated. She whispered:

"Go and have your tea. Professor Vaskovski is waiting there."

"And Panni Chavastovska?"

"She was unable to sit up and she wondered herself at the cause, but she went away nevertheless."

"I know the cause. The physician had hypnotized her, and he did well. Lida, you know, is better."

Marinya looked at him and he repeated:

"Really, better, if the paroxysm does not occur again, and there is hope that it will not."

"Thank God! But go and have your tea."

But he preferred whispering:

"All right, all right, in a little while. We must ar-

range about you taking a rest. I heard that your father was sick, so you must be tired."

"He has recovered, and I want to relieve Emilyya. She told me that the servants did not have a wink of sleep the whole night, for the child was so uneasy and restless. We must arrange so that some one will be in constant attendance on the sick."

"Well; but to-night I'll remain; if not in here, I'll sit in the other room and there wait for my turn. When did you learn of the crisis?"

"I was ignorant of it until this evening, when I came, as usual, to hear how she was."

"The valet came running to me during dinner. You can imagine how fast I ran, fearing that I would not find her alive. I have a good piece of news for you. While conversing at dinner with Bukatzki and Vaskovski about Tida, Mashko suddenly appeared and informed us that he was going to marry."

"Mashko!"

"Yes, it is not generally known; but he formally declared it to us. He is going to marry Panna Kraslovska, you remember her, the one that was at the Bigels'. It is a good match for Mashko."

There was a pause. Marinya often reproached herself for having rejected Mashko. She thought her refusal had caused him to suffer greatly, and now, having heard of his coming marriage, she felt cheered. But the news took her unawares, surprised her, and somewhat stung her. Women of a compassionate nature, require first of all that the object should really suffer, and then they themselves want to be the benefactors in relieving the suffering; when the same end is achieved through somebody else, they are greatly disappointed. Marinya's vanity was provoked in a twofold manner. She did not expect that Mashko would forget her so easily, and she had to confess that there was no foundation for her estimation of him as an exceptional man. She felt somewhat humiliated. She told, nevertheless, the truth to Polanetzki when she declared that she sincerely rejoiced at the news, although in reality she was displeased with him for having communicated it to her.

Polanetzki for some time past had been rather reserved with Marinya, and had not in the slightest degree manifested his feelings. But he was not excessively frigid either. Thanks to their being thrown together frequently, he preserved a kind of friendly freedom in his actions, and this led her to believe that he had ceased to love her. Such is human nature. Although her disappointment with him increased and was a continual source of poignancy, she thought that he was indifferent vexed her. And now it seemed that Polanetzki felt elated over her error concerning Mashko and the apparent desertion of her former admirer. But this was not Polanetzki's state of mind. It is true he was pleased that Marinya was undoubtedly mistaken in her opinion of Mashko, but the idea of her loneliness never crossed his mind, and, in any case, he was ready, now perhaps more than ever, to open his arms and press her in an affectionate embrace. Yet he worked hard and perseveringly, endeavoring to suppress, or at least curb, his feelings, only because he deemed it below man's dignity to put all the impulses of one's soul and heart into a love that was not even reciprocated. He would not "give in" to use his own expression, but he also understood that a struggle of this kind wearies and exhausts, and that victory, even if achieved, brings not joy, but a sense of emptiness. And, besides, he was still very far from victory. After many efforts he arrived at a condition where his feelings were mixed with bitterness, and this ferment decomposes love by simply poisoning it; in the course of time this result would perhaps be wrought in Polanetzki. But now, looking at Marinya sitting near him in the dim light of the night-lamp he was thinking: "Oh, if she only wished it!" This thought enraged him, but to be frank with himself he had to confess, that, if she only wished it, he would be at her feet in a moment. Another consideration crept into his mind. Even if Marinya, he thought, should want to live over again the days passed in Kremen, their misunderstanding had so entangled them, that her self-respect and anxiety not to prove untrue to herself, would close her lips.

After a brief conversation, silence ensued, interrupted only by the breathing of the sick child and the monot-

onous sound produced by the rain beating on the windows. It was a wet autumn night, so conducive to dejection, sadness, and discontent. Just as dreary appeared the room, in the sombre corners of which death was hovering. Hour after hour passed, and suddenly sad presentiments possessed Polanetzki. He cast a glance at Lida, and it seemed to him absurd to hope that she would live. Vain delusion, vain hopes! In vain the vigil! She must die, and the more so because she was so much loved. Yes, and then her mother, and after their death, for him, a hopeless killing void! What a life? Should he lose the only two beings who loved and cared for him! Will fate deprive him of all hope. With them fortune might yet smile upon his life, and without them—wretchedness, a blind, deaf, mad future!

Even the most energetic man must needs be loved, or he feels, in the presence of death, that his energy is turned against life. This moment had arrived for Polanetzki.

"And in fact I don't see," he thought, "why I should not send a bullet through my brain; certainly not from despair of losing these dear friends, but because of the emptiness of life without them. If life must remain dull, there is no reason in permitting oneself to grow stupid—save out of curiosity—to see what one can come to."

Of course, this thought crossed his mind not to be realized, but simply to torment the sorely tried man in a moment of anger, which sought to vent itself upon some object. It turned suddenly on Marinya. All at once it appeared to him, and he himself did not know why, that all the evil which had come among them was due to her influence, that she had brought within their circle discontent and sadness unknown there before, as if she had cast a stone upon the smooth surface of the waters of their life, and now the waves having expanded into gigantic circling billows, grasped not only him but Panni Chavastovska and her daughter. As a man controlled by his reason and not by his nerves, he comprehended the absurdity of these thoughts, but he could not tear from himself the remembrance that until the arrival of Marinya in Warsaw all was pleasant, so pleasant indeed that he considered those days the happiest of his life. He then loved Lida with

a father's love that did not mar a single moment, and who knows, perhaps, in the course of time he would also have loved her mother. It's true she did not entertain for him any other feeling save that of friendship, but this was perhaps because he did not require any other. Often a noble-minded woman will check the development of an incipient feeling, that is outside the bounds of mere friendship, fearing lest it should perplex or disturb the one that could but would not be a dear one. Naturally, there is hidden grief at the bottom of the heart of such an one, but still she is contented with that kind of tenderness that friendship will permit.

Polanetzki, having formed Marinya's acquaintance, gave to her at once the best part of his love. What was the consequence? Heartache; and now, to fill the cup of bitterness, Lida—the only bright ray in his clouded life—is dying. Polanetzki looked again at her.

"Would not you at least remain, my dear!" he thought. "You do not know how much your mother and I are in need of you! Lord knows what a life ours will be without thee, dear creature!" Suddenly he observed that the girl's eyes were upon him. Thinking it an illusion he did not stir, but the child began to smile and said at last:

"Is it you, Pan Stach?"

"Yes, it's I, dear Lida. Well, how do we feel?"

"Well! And where is mamma?"

"She'll soon be here. We had quite a struggle with her about going to bed, and it was with difficulty that we persuaded her to do so."

Lida turned her head.

"Ah, and Aunt Marinya is here?" she rejoined, noticing her.

Sometimes Lida called Marinya aunt.

Marinya rose, took a vial from the cupboard and poured several drops of medicine into a spoon. She took it then to the girl, and with a kiss on her forehead requested her to swallow it.

It was very quiet in the room; at last, Lida, as if speaking to herself said:

"We will not need mamma."

"No, we will not disturb her. Everything will be just as Lida wishes it."

He then began to pat her hand which was resting on the covers. She was looking at him and, childlike, was repeating:

"Oh, Pan Stach, Pan Stach!"

In a minute it seemed that the girl was falling asleep, but she apparently was thinking of something serious, for her eyebrows were raised as if in an effort to concentrate all her mental strength. Finally she opened her eyes and began to gaze now at Marinya, now at Polanetzki.

In the room only the noise of the rain beating on the windows was heard.

"What is the matter with you, my child?" asked Marinya.

The girl, putting together her little hands, almost inaudibly said:

"Aunt Marinya! . . . I have a great favor to ask of you, but I dare not."

Marinya bent her gentle face.

"Tell me, my dear! I'll do anything you wish me to."

The girl grasped her hand, pressed it to her lips and exclaimed:

"That aunt should love Pan Stach."

In the silence that ensued only the rapid breathing of the sick child was distinctly heard.

"All right, my dear!" Marinya at last stammered.

There was a choking sensation in Polanetzki's throat, he almost burst into tears. Everything, not excepting Marinya, disappeared from his vision in the presence of that child, who, on the brink of death, was thinking only of him.

"And that aunt should marry him . . ." rejoined Lida.

Marinya grew pale, her lips trembled, but she replied unfalteringly:

"Very well, Lida, I will."

The child again kissed Marinya's hand, and then her little head sank in the pillow. She lay there for some time with closed eyes, a few pearly tears soon appearing and slowly rolling down her face.

A still longer pause ensued. The monotonous beating of the rain on the window-panes continued. Polanetzki and Marinya sat motionless. They felt that suddenly a great change had been wrought in their lives, but they seemed stunned by what had occurred, and were lost in a chaos of thoughts and emotions.

They both avoided even an occasional glance, and hour after hour passed in silence. The clock struck twelve, then—one ; about two o'clock Panni Chavastovska slipped like a shadow into the room.

"Asleep?" she inquired.

"No, dear mamma," returned Lida.

"How do you feel, my child?"

"Very well, mother."

She sat down by the bed. The girl clasped her neck, and fondly pressing the little head to that dear bosom, exclaimed:

"Now, mamma dear, I know that a sick child's request is always granted?"

She silently pressed closer and closer to the mother and then slowly uttered:

"Now, Pan Stach will not be unhappy any more, and I'll tell you why . . ."

Suddenly her head began to grow heavy, and the poor mother felt a cold perspiration on the hands and temples of the girl.

"Lida!" she exclaimed in a frightened but low voice.

"It's strange, I became weak all at once" . . . returned the child.

Apparently her thoughts began to wander, for after a short pause, she continued:

"O, what a big sea! very big . . . We are all sailing on it. . . Mamma, mamma! . . ."

And again the awful paroxysms. The body stretched convulsively and the eyes rolled back. Now, the nature of the crisis was mercilessly clear: death came. It was felt in the pale light of the lamp, in the somber corners of the room, in the drizzling rain on the window-panes, and in the howling wind full of despair.

Polanetzki, ran for the physician. They returned together in a quarter of an hour, and stopped at the closed

door, not sure that the child still lived. They soon entered, Polanetzki followed by the physician who was repeatedly murmuring :

“ It must be fright or a violent agitation.”

The servants with their sleepy and frightened faces were crowded around the door listening. In the house a long, dismal, dreary silence reigned. It was broken by Marinya who, pale and haggard, came in from the sick-room.

“ Some water for the Panni,” she exclaimed in a trembling voice—“ the Panna is dead ! ”

XIX.

AUTUMN was still smiling through its declining days, although sadly, not unlike a woman dying of a slow disease. Just such weather,—serene, but mournful, they had on the day of the funeral. Polanetzki, occupied with the preparations for the last melancholy duty felt relieved when he thought that Lida would have liked such weather. He could not yet fathom the depth of his grief. This consciousness comes later, when the beloved one has been placed in the grave, and one returns alone to the deserted house. Besides, the arrangements for the funeral filled all his time and left little leisure for painful recollections.

And Panni Chavastovska! All the springs by which man moves and thinks were shattered in her: the violent gust proved too much for the fleece of the weakly lamb. Fortunately, very severe pain kills itself by striking the victim senseless. The shock stunned Panni Chavastovska, and she could hardly realize its horror. There was a look of terror, as if congealed in her face, but no tears, no words. Now, and then a suggestion tragically childish and trivial—proved that her thoughts did not comprehend the awful misfortune, but hovered around the accompanying details, clinging to them and surrounding them with as much care as if the child were alive. She was constantly around Lida, reposing amidst the flowers on the satin pillow, anxiously inspecting every trifle. When led away she did not resist but would render a heart-breaking groan, as if a mortal blow had been inflicted upon her.

But the time for closing the coffin arrived. Polanetzki and Pan Chavastovska, her husband's brother, who arrived on the very eve of the funeral, made an effort to lead her out of the room. She called the dead child by her name, and their courage failed them. . . . At last, the mournful procession moved amid torches, carriages and the clergy

chanting a doleful psalm. A curious unpleasant crowd surrounded the coffin.

In olden times people flocked to amphitheaters to feast their eyes on human gore, now they glut them with human grief. Panni Chavastovska, supported by her husband's brother and Marinya walked behind the coffin. Her face was dry and expressionless. All her thoughts were bent on one trifle. It happened that a curl of Lida's thick blonde hair was caught between the lid and coffin, and the mother's gaze was riveted on it. All the way through she murmured :

"O, God, God ! they press my child's hair !"

Polanetzki's grief, fatigue, nervousness—all turned into one feeling, a sense of extreme heaviness and oppression. It was almost unbearable, and he was often seized with a strong desire to return home, throw himself on the lounge, stifle all thought, feeling, love, wish—complete forgetfulness. This selfish impulse surprised and agitated him. He knew he would not return, but would drain the cup of bitterness to the last drop. Now he felt that all his feelings had shriveled up, faded away, and that there was an absolute void in his heart. Finally, his thoughts were plunged into a complete chaos of outside impressions, sorrow, despair and inward observations. Now the color of the houses attracted his attention, then a sign which he read, not knowing why, or he would wonder when the clergymen would cease chanting, then again he would fear lest they should resume their doleful psalms. Suddenly the face of the dear child would emerge from that chaos, and a flood of recollections rushed on him. Now he saw her in Reichenhall when he carried her in his arms from Thumsee; then in the country-house of the Bigel's; at home, when she wished to be a birch; and finally on her deathbed when she asked Marinya to marry him. He did not consciously presume that the child was in love with him as a grown-up woman; in fact her unconscious feelings could not be so understood—but he felt that she sacrificed herself. It followed from her deep attachment for him.

"This was the only heart that cherished me! And now I have nobody in this world! . . ." he said to himself.

And raising his eyes to that blonde curl fluttering in the wind he inwardly called Lida by all those tender names and endearments which he used in conversing with her. He felt the tears choking him when his appeals remained unheeded. In fact, there is something heart-rending in that silence and indifference of the dead. Besides the pain of sustained loss there is a sense of an awful deception, an offense inflicted by this dead body that remains deaf to all our entreaties and prayers. A similar feeling arose in Polanetzki's breast. Lida had left him for the land of death. Instead of a free, familiar, and trusting creature, she had become reserved and solemn, indifferent to the sufferings of a mother and the loneliness of a loving friend. There was certainly an element of egoism in these feelings ; but for the sense of one's own loss, men, especially believers in a future life, would not pity the dead.

At last the mournful chariot emerged from the town into the open fields, and soon reached the gate of the cemetery. Wreaths and garlands of immortelles and firs intended for the grave were hung on the wall. The men with the torches, the clergymen in their white sacerdotal vestments, and the chariot, stopped at the gate. Polanetzki, Bukatzki, Bigel and Vaskovski carried the coffin to the sepulchre of Lida's father. They put it down near the open grave. A heart-rending "*Requiem æternam*" and then—" *Anima ejus*" resounded.

Polanetzki ran through the chaos of his thoughts and impressions, as if in a dream ; Lida's coffin, the stony face and glassy eyes of Panni Vaskavski, Marinya's tears and Bukatzki's pale face. The coffin was lowered into the grave, and an engraved stone placed on the opening. Something choked him and he remained in a trance. He was brought to himself by a violent gust of the wind, and he saw at the grave Panni Chavastovska, Marinya, Bigel's wife, Vaskovski and Lida's uncle. The strangers had gradually departed. He was now thinking of death. It seemed to him that he and those standing at the grave were rushing over a yawning precipice. No thought of a life beyond the tomb entered his mind.

Meanwhile the early autumn evening advanced. The

old professor and Chavastovska led the sad woman to the gate. Polanetzki took his final leave of the dear child and left. Crossing the gateway he thought:

"It is fortunate that the mother is void of feeling, otherwise what a dreadful thought,—the child left alone in the cemetery! . . . Well, if the dead leave us, the living leave them."

From afar he perceived a carriage, driving away with Panni Chavastovska. The order of things seemed to him outrageous.

He also entered a cab, with the selfish thought, that now, at last, at the end of a tormenting act, a period of rest will follow. But on his return home the room appeared empty, mournful, hopeless. However, when after tea he threw himself on the sofa and stretched his legs, he was again possessed with that sense of animal pleasure at the prospect of a good rest after the hard ordeal. And here the opinion of a great thinker recurred to him: "I do not know villains, I only know honest men, but even they are loathsome." And Polanetzki at this moment appeared to himself loathsome.

In the evening he bethought himself of the widow. Marinya had taken her to her house for a few weeks. Before leaving he approached the table and kissed Lida's portrait.* In a quarter of an hour he rang the bell at Plavitski's.

A valet that opened the door told him that Pan was out, but beside Marinya there was inside Vaskovski and the priest Chilyak. Marinya met him in the parlor, uncombed, with red eyes, almost frightful. Her formerly reserved manner had changed, as if through the misfortune of others she had forgotten her own afflictions.

"Emilya is with me," she whispered. "She is very bad, but I think she understands when spoken to. Vaskovski is there. . . . He talks so earnestly to her. . . . Must you see her?"

"No; I only came to inquire how she feels. I'll leave at once."

"No, she might want to see you. . . . Rest yourself here. I'll go to her and mention at a favorable moment

that you are here. Lida was very fond of you, and Emilyya might, therefore, be pleased to see you now."

"Very well," returned Polanetzki.

Marinya went into the adjoining room. Through the half-opened door he could hear Vaskovski utter words of consolation.

. . . "It is the same as if she had gone into another room for a toy. Certainly, she'll not return, but you will go to her. . . You must take another point of view. . . The child is alive and happy. Being in the region of eternity she considers the parting of very short duration. Lida is alive—" he emphasized—"and happy. She sees you going to meet her, and she stretches her little hands. She knows that you will come to her, for God giveth life and death in the twinkling of the eye, and then eternity together with Lida. Just think of it—together with Lida. . . eternal tranquillity and joy. . . The world will perish, but you will live."

"It would be good if it were true," Polanetzki thought. "And if I felt that way, there would be no need for me to go to that room."

And not waiting for Marinya's return he entered the room. Great suffering precludes help or consolation. Polanetzki understood this, and he was ashamed of drawing back before the mother's grief. On entering the room he perceived Panni Chavastovska lying on the sofa. There was a palm near by that spread its broad leaves over the sufferer's head. Vaskovski sat there, holding her hand and looking steadily into her eyes. Polanetzki approached. He withdrew the hands of the priest and bending down to hers kissed them.

Panni Chavastovska sighed as if making an effort to awake from her slumber, and then suddenly exclaimed :

"And do you remember, how she——"

Here she burst into tears, her hands compressed, her lips convulsed, and her breast violently agitated with hysterical sobbing. At last she fainted away, and when restored to consciousness, she was led by Marinya into her room. Polanetzki and Vaskovski went to the parlor and met there Plavitski who had returned a minute previous.

"This sad lady in my house affects my life dreadfully.

I need more quietude and freedom, but what can be done? I must withdraw to the background."

In half an hour Marinya came to say that Panni Chavastovska after considerable entreaty had consented to go to sleep, and that she was a little calmer. Polanetzki and Vaskovski took their leave.

Going in the dense fog that overhung the streets after the sunny day, both thought of Lida, who was passing that night far from her mother in the habitation of the dead. This appeared dreadful, not, of course, for Lida, but for the mother, who also probably thought of it. He was pondering over Vaskovski's remarks to the poor widow. At last he said:

I overheard you. It's good if it relieved her; but don't you see,—if your sentiments were true, we ought to—well—even be thankful for Lida's death?"

"How do you know we would not after we are gone?"

"And will you tell me if I confess my ignorance?"

"I do not know, but I have faith."

This, of course, could not be disputed. Polanetzki, as if speaking to himself, said:

"Mercy, life beyond the tomb, eternity—these are abstractions. . . In reality, there is the child's corpse in the graveyard and the mother convulsed with hysterics. . . Did this death arouse hope or faith? You pity the child, but I suffer. . . Can I help asking why did the child die? . . . I know the question is absurd, unanswerable. . . But this is why I feel like gnashing my teeth and cursing. . . It is beyond my comprehension, and I rebel—that's all. Even you will not consider such results desirable."

In his turn Vaskovski said:

"Christ, as a man, died. Will I, insignificant worm that I am, doubt God's providence?"

"Well, there is little comfort to be obtained from you," returned Polanetzki.

"It's slippery. . . Will you give me your arm?"

And, supporting himself on Polanetzki's arm, he continued:

"Ah, my dear? Yours is a kind loving heart. You were very fond of the child. You did a great deal for

her. Will you do her the last favor?—a short prayer for the repose of her soul. . . Whether you believe or not do it for her sake.”

“Oh, leave me alone.”

“She will be thankful for your remembrance, and will obtain God’s favor in your behalf.”

Polanetzki recalled his last conversation with the priest in a restaurant. Vaskovski observed then that the life of the child would not pass without purpose. She would not die before accomplishing her mission. Polanetzki now thought if his engagement to Marinya was not the aim spoken of. Then another thought crossed his mind—perhaps she only lived for that purpose. He suddenly became enraged at Marinya.

“I do not want her at such a price,” he shrieked inwardly. “I’d give ten such for one Lida.”

Meanwhile Vaskovski continued.

“I don’t see anything; the stones are slippery, and but for you I would have stumbled.”

“Don’t you see, professor?” Polanetzki replied—“who ever walks here below must needs look on the earth and not at heaven.”

“Well, you have strong legs.”

“And eyes that clearly see, even in this fog. We all live in a mist, and do not know what is beyond it. Your words produce upon me the same impression as if you took a dry stem, threw it in the water and declared that flowers would grow on it. It is not true. It will not—that’s all. Nonsense! . . Well, here is my gate. Good-night.”

And they parted. Polanetzki returned almost dead with fatigue. He threw himself down on the bed. His morbid imagination would not leave him.

“I could philosophize till to-morrow,” he murmured. But for what end? All there is in life is this hand that casts the shadow.”

His thoughts reverted to Lida. He recalled Vaskovski’s request for a prayer. He began to struggle with himself. He felt a natural shame to utter words in which he had no belief.

“But I don’t know,” he thought. “There is a mist

around us. Certainly, my sham prayer would be of no use to her. . . But then this is the sole service I can render that dear child, who on the very brink of death thought of me."

He hesitated a few minutes longer, then on his knees prayed for the repose of her soul.

The prayer did not comfort him. On the contrary, it aroused a still greater sorrow for Lida and anger at Vas-kovski for putting him in such a false position. At last he felt that he had had enough of agonizing thoughts and self-torment. He resolved to engage the very next day in some commercial enterprise with Bigel, only to forget himself.

But Bigel forestalled him. He came early in the morning, probably for the purpose of distracting him with business. He willingly set about current business affairs, but they were engaged only a short time when Bukatzki entered the room.

"Farewell!" he said—"I leave for Italy to-day, and don't know when I'll return. Good-bye! . . . The death of that child distressed me more than I expected. . . Well, there is this much to say . . . Here, you see, one cannot detach himself from belief in a sort of grace, mercy . . . But the reality is so stern. It sets you at war with yourself, oppresses your soul. Here one always loves somebody. Another's misfortune fills you with compassion, agitates you . . . But I don't want this . . . It vexes me . . .

"How will Italy help you?"

"How? Why there is a sun that we don't see here. There is art for which I feel a weakness. There are wines that produce a most salutary effect on my stomach, and finally there live people that do not in the least concern me—they might die by the hundreds without causing any unpleasantness to me. I'll gaze at the pictures, buy what I need, cure my rheumatism. Yes, I'll be a satiated healthy animal; . . . this after all constitutes the more desirable side of our life. Here it is impossible to be an animal—I must move therefore to a more congenial field."

"You are right, Bukatzki. Here we sit plunged into dismal calculations just to forget ourselves. When we

make as large a fortune as you possess, we certainly will follow your example. I don't know about Bigel, but I will."

"Au revoir then," Bukatzki said and went away.

"He is right," observed Polanetzki after Bukatzki left, "I myself would probably be happier but for that attachment to Lida and her mother."

In this respect we are incorrigible,—voluntarily destroying our lives . . . Really, here one always loves somebody . . . Continuous sentimentalism . . . Result—continuous heartaches.

"Plavitski sends his regards to you," Bigel interrupted.

"This fellow does not love anybody except himself."

"In fact, that is so. But he has not the reason nor the courage to declare to himself that self-love is the best condition of existence. On the contrary, he is convinced that it should be otherwise, and is therefore a slave. In this instance the lucky possessor of a nature like his must dissemble even before himself."

"Will you be at Panni Chavastovska's."

"Most decidedly!"

In fact that day he was there twice. The ladies were absent the first time he called. He inquired of Plavitski where his daughter was. The latter replied with pathos: "Now I have no daughter!" Fearing lest he might say something harsh to him, Polanetzki departed and came back in the evening:

He was met by Marinya. She informed him that Emilya had fallen into a sound sleep for the first time since the funeral. She held his hand while saying this. Notwithstanding the chaotic disorder of his thoughts, Polanetzki could not fail to observe it. He cast at her an inquiring glance, and she blushed slightly. They sat down side by side.

"We went to the cemetery," Marinya said, "and I promised Emilya to go there every day."

"Will it be judicious to remind her daily of the child and thus irritate the wound?"

"Could you then prevail on her not to go? I myself thought at first that it would not be advisable, but am now convinced to the contrary. Though she wept, she

felt a little relieved. On our return she recalled Vas-kovski's remarks. That thought of reunion has become her only comfort."

"I hope it will be a real comfort."

"At first I tried not to mention Lida, but she herself would continually speak of her. You also may talk of the child, for it apparently relieves her."

Marinya now lowered her voice and rejoined:

"She constantly reproaches herself for having listened to the physician and gone to bed. She regrets the time lost that might have been spent with the child. The thought is killing her. Returning from the cemetery she inquired how the child looked, how long she slept, if she took the medicine, and what she said. She begged me not to miss a word."

"And did you tell her all?"

"Yes."

"How did she take it?"

"She wept."

Both were silent. Marinya at last rejoined:

"I will see how she is."

She soon returned.

"Asleep, thank God!" she said.

That evening Polanetzki did not see the widow. She was as in a lethargic slumber. On parting, Marinya again pressed his hand and almost timidly inquired,

"You'll not be angry with me for having communicated to Emilyya the last wish of her daughter?"

"At such moments I can't think of myself,"—he replied.

"Now I am anxious for Emilyya; if your words relieved her, however slightly, I am grateful to you."

"And so till to-morrow?"

"Yes, till to-morrow."

Polanetzki took his leave. Coming down the stairs, he thought.

"She evidently considers herself my bride."

He was not mistaken. She never was indifferent to him; on the contrary, the bitterness of the affront only manifested the unusual interest he aroused in her. Besides, during Lida's sickness and funeral he appeared to her so kind and noble that she scarcely knew with whom

to compare him. The rest was done by Lida. Her heart yearned for love. She promised Lida to marry him. These were sufficient considerations to install him into the sphere of her life. She was one of those women—and they are not scarce even now—for whom life and duty mean one and the same thing and who bring with them into the family a good and firm will. This will leads to love serene as the sun, gentle and soothing as the blue of the firmament. Life then grows not as a thorn-bush that cuts and pricks, but as a flower, blossoming and perfuming the air.

This country-girl, simple, tender and truthful, possessed in the highest degree the capacity for life and happiness.

After Polanetzki left she did not call him otherwise than “my Pan Stach.”

Polanetzki going to bed thought once more:

“Yes, she does consider herself my bride.”

But Lida’s death had removed her to the background, not only in his thoughts but even in his heart.

Now, while again thinking of her and his future a whole series of questions arose that could hardly find an answer. He feared them, not possessing now the strength or the will to solve them. Will he resume his former life, with its sentimentalism, anxiety, self-scrutiny? Would it not be more reasonable to dissolve partnership with Bigel, collect the money, and follow Bukatzki into Italy, where there was the sun, the arts, the wines and the indifferent crowd in whom death or misfortune would not cause him a single tear.

VOLUME II.

CHAPTER I.

NOTWITHSTANDING all his mental vicissitudes, the business of the firm of Polanetzki and Bigel increased and prospered. Thanks to the hard common-sense, and the watchfulness of the phlegmatic Bigel, all orders were attended to with the customary promptness and accuracy; and no complaints ever came from their numerous clients. The firm's reputation was enviably established. An era of prosperity was in store for the two friends who so widely differed in everything but their zeal for labor. True, Polanetzki's work was not accompanied by that ease and tranquillity of former days, but his assiduity surprised even Bigel. His mornings he spent invariably at his desk in the office; the more his troubles had increased since the arrival of Marinya at Warsaw, the more devoted he had become to the task of making money. This task, often difficult, exacting and involving a great strain upon his mental abilities, became to him a necessity, something of a haven, wherein he sought shelter from the tempest, and Polanetzki delighted in it. "Here, at least, I know what I am doing," said he frequently to Bigel,—“and what I am struggling for; here everything is clear and apparent. If I do not find in it happiness, I will at least find the freedom to work and hoard money. Recent events strengthened this conviction. He was an absolute dismal failure in matters emotional and sentimental; wherever his feelings were concerned, the result was nothing but bitter fruits, while his business by reason of its successive gains seemed to harden him and protect him from calamities. Polanetzki himself was sincerely convinced that it was so.

He was mistaken. He could not help feeling the narrowness of the satisfaction given by the success of his firm. However, at the same time, he said to himself that it were best to cling to this haven, that it were better to be a merchant upon whom Dame Fortune smiled bewitchingly, than to be a romantic individual to whom Fate has shown no quarter. The death of Lida precipitated his decision to crush within him all inclinations, all cravings and longings that differed so much from sober, stern, reality, and brought nothing but bitter disappointments. Naturally, Bigel was elated by his partner's turn of mind, which was so beneficial to their common interests. Polanetzki, however, could not for several weeks get rid of past associations, or remain indifferent to what only recently was so near and dear to his heart. Time and again, he visited the grave of Lida, whose tombstone the first frost had bleached. Twice he came face to face there with Panni Chavastovska and Panna Plavitski. Once he escorted the broken-hearted mother home. She thanked him effusively for his devotion to her daughter's memory. Polanetzki noticed that she seemed perfectly tranquil; and he understood her composure, when she, at parting, said to him: "I constantly think now, that she who is wedded to eternity, deems our parting brief! You know how happy I am, that she does not long and pine for me!"

The conviction that rang in her passionate words astonished Polanetzki. "If this is a self-deception," thought he,—“it is indeed a gross illusion, which may call forth a spring of life even from a gravestone . . .”

Marinya confirmed to Polanetzki, that Panni Chavastovska was only kept alive by that idea, which alone gave her strength to bear her grief. For days she discussed with Marinya the one topic,—death, which she styled a temporary parting. She spoke with such firm conviction, so insistently, that finally Marinya seriously began to fear for her friend's reason. "She speaks of Lida," added Marinya, "as if the child were alive, and she would see it to-day or to-morrow."

"This is very fortunate!" remarked Polanetzki. Vas-ko-vski rendered a great service, indeed; such an idea in one's head causes no pain . . ."

"She is right after all . . . It is really so . . ."

"I do not dispute it . . ."

Marinya entertained grave fears for her friend's health. She dreaded her constant dwelling on that one thought, but, at the same time she looked upon death from the same point of view, in virtue of which the slight hint of skepticism in Polanetzki's words somewhat displeased her. Not wishing to betray it, however, she changed the conversation.

"I ordered the enlargement of Lida's photo," said she, "and yesterday I received three copies. I will give one of them to Emilya. I was afraid to offer it to her before, but now I see that it is perfectly safe,—in fact,—it will delight her." She went to the book-shelf, took three photographs wrapped in paper, then sat down at a small table near Polanetzki, and began to remove the pictures from their covers.

"Emilya told me," she continued, "about your conversation with Lida before her death, in which the poor child expressed her artless desire that you three were birches and were growing in the forest each near the other. Do you recall that conversation?"

"Yes, I do. She marveled at the fact that trees live so long, and then decided that she wished to be a birch—her mother liked that one best."

—"And you said that you wanted to grow near her . . . Therefore I determined to sketch birch trees on these photos. Here, you see, I made a fair beginning—which however, did not develop well, because my hand has held no pencil or brush for a long time. Neither can I draw well from memory."

She showed him one of the photos, on which was a reproduction of a birch. Being somewhat near-sighted, she bent over her work so low, that her temple almost touched that of Polanetzki.

But she was no longer to him the Marinya of the past days, the Marinya he dreamed of, returning home from his daily visits to Panni Chavastovska, the Marinya that dwelled in his heart. That time had passed, and his thoughts turned into another direction. Still, Marinya ceased not to be for him that type of womanhood which

exercised such an influence, produced such an impression upon his masculine nerves, and now when her temple touched his, when with one long wistful look he took in her pale face, her slightly flushed cheeks, her slender figure bent gracefully over her drawing, the old passion awakened, the warm blood boiled within him and drove into his head wild passionate thoughts.

"What would happen, if I were now to kiss her," thought he; "how would she receive my kisses?" And in a moment he was seized by a violent, irresistible desire to do it, even at the cost of losing her respect forever. He wanted to reward himself for the numberless repulsions, disappointments, and annoyances, and at the same time, even avenge them.

In the meantime, Marinya, examining her drawing, continued: "To-day my work seems to me even poorer than yesterday. Unfortunately, the trees are now bare—leafless, and I possess no original to copy the birches from."

"No, this group is not at all bad," protested Polanetzki, "but as it is supposed to represent Lida, her mother and myself, why did you draw four birches?"

"The fourth—is myself," timidly replied Marinya, "I, too, wished to grow alongside of you."

Polanetzki raised his head from the drawing and quickly glanced at her.

Wrapping up the pictures, she hurriedly added: "With this child are associated some of my best recollections of former days. You know, that before her death, I spent most of my time with her and Emilyya, . . . and now the latter is the only and the nearest, dearest friend I possess. It is as though I belonged to them, like yourself . . . But there were four of us, . . . now there are only three, and we're all attached by and to Lida . . . She united us, and now whenever I think of her, I also think of you and Emilyya . . . Therefore I resolved to paint four birches, and as you see I have three copies: one for Emilyya, one for you, and one for myself."

"Thank you," said Polanetzki, giving her his hand.

Marinya shook it heartily and added:

"In the remembrance of her, we must forget all our former slights and disagreements."

"That is long forgotten, and as to myself, I wish it were so before Lida died."

"Just from that very moment began my error, and I beg your pardon."

Now she held out her little hand, and he hesitated between his desire to impress a kiss upon it and to control his awakening passion. He did not kiss it.

"Then it means peace?" said he.

"And friendship," replied Marinya.

"And friendship," echoed Polanetzki.

In the eyes of the young girl shone a deep quiet joy, which lighted her face with a tender light. There was in that face now so much kindness and confidence, that Polanetzki unwillingly recalled that Marinya he knew at Kremen, on that memorable evening when she sat on the piazza, haloed by the last rays of the setting sun. However, he was in such a depressed mood since the death of Lida that he thought these recollections unworthy of his dignity. He rose and began to take leave.

"Will you not remain with us for the rest of the evening?" asked Marinya.

"No, I must go."

"I will notify Emilyya that you are going," added, she turning towards the door. "She is probably now deep in her thoughts of Lida, or praying for her soul, or she would have come in long before this."

"Do not molest her. I will come to-morrow."

Marinya drew nearer, and, looking straight into his eyes, said with great cordiality:

"And to-morrow, and every day. . . will you not? Remember that you are now for us— Pan Stach."

Since the death of Lida, Marinya had used that name twice. Going home, Polanetzki thought:

"Now our relations have undergone a wonderful change. She feels herself to be mine, because she bound herself with a promise made to the dying child. She is ready even to fall in love with me, and will not permit herself to love any one else. . . Such women are to be found everywhere, and in our country their name—is legion."

And suddenly he became excited.

"I know only too well these natures, with icy hearts and exalted heads, filled with so-called regulations; everything for the sake of a rule, everything for the sake of a duty and obligation, and nothing independent in their hearts. Had I fallen to their feet, a dying fool, derision would have been my fate; but when duty commands them to love, they do love indeed."

Evidently Polanetzki was accustomed in his wanderings through foreign lands to women of another type, or at least, has read about them. But as he possessed a certain amount of common sense, his judgment said to him: "Listen, Polanetzki, exceptional natures exist on whom solid foundations of life may be based. Have you lost your senses? You were clamoring for a wife, not for a momentary enchantment by a woman."

But Polanetzki began to question within himself and to reply: "If I am to be loved, I want to be loved for myself, for my own sake."

Reason tried to prove that however might be the beginning of love, he would afterward be loved for his own sake, indeed, that in his case after all his tribulations this possibility must be regarded as a Godsend. But Polanetzki persisted in torturing himself.

At last to the aid of reason came that natural desire for the possession of Marinya, in virtue of which Polanetzki discovered in her more captivating charms than in any other woman. This burning, all-consuming desire said to him: "I know not whether you love her or not, but to-day when she accidentally drew near to you and her face breathed warmth upon your cheek, you almost went wild. Why do you retain your composure, why are you cool and calm in the society of other women? Think of the difference!"

Polanetzki was stubborn; to all these arguments he had but one reply: "A fish! A veritable fish!"

And again the thought knocked for admission: "Catch her then, if you like this kind best. Men marry—and it is high time for you to do so. What more do you want? Do you want a love that will in after days become the subject of your own ridicule? Let your love be dead and gone, but the enchantment is there strong as ever, and so

is the unshaken conviction that she is a pure, honest woman." . . .

"Yes," he continued to meditate, "but love, stupid or sensible, gives birth to freedom. But do I enjoy that freedom now? No, because I hesitate, I waver, which I never did before. Besides, it must be decided: which is better? Panna Plavitski or "debit and credit" in the commercial house of Bigel and Polanetzki? Money creates power and liberty. One may enjoy liberty only when he bears no burden on his shoulders nor in his heart."

Thus meditating, Polanetzki reached his home and went to bed. At night he dreamed of birch trees on sandy mounds, calm blue eyes and a forehead shaded by dark hair, from which breathed an intoxicating warmth.

CHAPTER II.

ONE morning, a few days afterward, before Polanetzki left his lodging for his office, Mashko was announced.

"I came to you," said the latter, "with a double purpose, but will begin with the financial side of it so that you may be able to answer me briefly: "yes or no."

"All financial matters I attend to in the office: Tackle the other."

"This transaction does not belong to your company; it is private, and therefore I wish to discuss it privately. You know that I am about to get married, and am consequently in urgent need of money. Expenses are as numerous as hairs on the human head, and bills are becoming due daily. The date set for the first payment of your claim on Kremen is at hand. Can you not postpone it for another three months?"

"I shall be frank with you," said Polanetzki, "I can—but will not."

"I will pay you in the same coin, and speak openly; what will you do if I fail to pay on the day appointed?"

"Many queer things happen in this world, and this may be one of them. But it seems to me you consider me a great deal more wanting in gray matter than I really am. I know that you *will* pay."

"Whence that certainty, pray!"

"Marrying a rich girl, you cannot afford to ruin your chances by declaring yourself bankrupt. You'll wrench it from Hades, but pay you will."

"From an empty pitcher even the wise Solomon could scarcely pour out anything."

"Because he was denied the benefit of your lessons. But, my dear fellow, no one will hear us here, and I may just as well be blunt; you have never done anything more in your whole career."

"So you are convinced that I will pay?"

"Absolutely."

"You are right. I only expected from you a courtesy, which, to tell the truth, I had no right to hope for. But even I, at last, feel worn out and exhausted. To take here, pay there, always living in a whirl, it surpasses all human strength of endurance. However, I will soon be safely sheltered in my haven; within two months I will be on my feet again, and sailing with full steam up. So you cannot grant my request? . . . It's hard! Well, if there's no other escape, the timber left in Kremen will go to satisfy your claim."

"What timber? Old Plavitski sold everything there was."

"No. There is still an oak forest, near Nedlyakoff."

"Yes, 'tis true, there is one."

"I know that you and Bigel speculate on such commodities, and I am therefore offering the timber to you. This will save me the trouble of looking for a purchaser, while you will make a neat gain."

"Very well. I will speak to Bigel about your proposition."

"Then, you are not rejecting it?"

"No, if your terms are reasonable. But in such transactions I must have time to consider the probable gains or losses. Besides, I do not know your conditions. Prepare them, and send me a detailed description of the location of the timber and its alleged quality. I do not remember it."

"I will send it to you in an hour."

"Then you will receive an answer to-night."

"One condition I will mention at once: You must not cut the timber before two months from the date of sale."

"Why?"

"Because Kremen will lose a great deal by the loss of this natural ornament. And after the wedding I hope to induce you to sell me the same at a higher price."

"We'll see."

"Besides, Kremen has rich deposits of chalky clay. Plavitski calculated it to be worth millions. But that is absurd of course. In the hands of enterprising men,

however, it may turn out a well-paying investment. Think the matter over with Bigel, we might work the thing together, by forming a company.

"Our firm is established for just such transactions. But they must be good, reliable. . ."

"Very well. We'll leave this to the future."

"The main idea of our agreement must be such, that I, in exchange for the sum due you, transfer to you the forest, or part of it, which is given in a certain sense as a mortgage. You agree not to cut the timber before the lapse of three months."

"This can be arranged. There will, indeed, come a time soon, when good timber will be in demand by railroad companies and others. This can better be discussed at the drawing of the contract, if it takes place."

"And so one stone is off my shoulder," said Mashko, wiping his perspiring forehead, "I have daily no less than ten or fifteen such transactions, not counting my financial discussions with Panni Kraslovska. And these transactions come very hard, much harder in fact, than the courting of a bride, who—"

Mashko stammered for a moment, then waving his hand, added: "Who is not too soft or easy."

Polanetzki looked at him with astonishment. These words coming from the lips of Mashko, a man carefully observing the code of wordly mannerisms—gingerly weighing every syllable—were a great surprise.

Meanwhile Mashko continued: "But this is neither here nor there. Do you remember how, before the death of Lida, we two almost quarreled? I paid no heed then to the fact that you were so deeply attached to the girl, that you were alarmed and despairing for her health, and my conduct was somewhat rash and rough. . . I was to blame for it myself, and now beg your pardon."

"This has long been forgotten."

"But I recollect it now, because I want you to grant me one favor. You see, I have no real friends, nor relatives, or such that are worth having. I am in dire need now of a 'best man,' and am really at sea. . . You know that I look after the estates of many a nobleman. But to invite the first clown of a nobleman just because of his title

will not do. Besides the idea of it is loathsome to me. I want ushers,—respectable men, and, to speak frankly, with good untarnished names, for my ladies are so particular about every little thing. Won't you be best man?"

"I would not have refused you had you come to me under different circumstances. But now I cannot, and will tell you why: I wear no mourning officially, but I give you my word of honor that I am mourning more now, than if my own child had died."

"Yes, I did not think of this. . . Pardon me."

Polanetzki felt flattered by Mashko's words, and he continued: "Still if it is necessary. If you can, indeed, find no one else to take my place, I will submit, though speaking candidly, after such a loss it is hard to participate at a wedding."

True, Polanetzki did not say: "at *such* a wedding," but Mashko guessed the hidden thought.

"Besides," continued Polanetzki,—there are other reasons. You surely have heard of a certain beggar—a physician—who madly loved your betrothed. Naturally no one can condemn her for not returning his love, but the poor devil went away where beggars go—and, thanks to her chiefly, emigrated—ad patres—you understand? Well, and I was his bosom friend. He confided in me, spoke to me of his misery, wept on my breast. Under such circumstances to be best man of another—I leave it to your judgment." *

"And he, that physician, really died from the love of her?"

"Have you never heard of it?"

"Not only have I never heard of it, but even now, I scarcely believe my ears."

"You know, Mashko: they say that marriage changes a man; but I see now that a mere betrothal plays havoc with some of them. I fail to recognize you."

"Because, as I told you, I am terribly exhausted and worn out. I haven't had a fair breathing-spell. At such crucial moments the mask falls off."

"The mask? What do you mean?"

"I mean that there are in this world two classes of people: some create nothing from nothing and keep their

actions in harmony with the circumstances. Others cultivate their own system and act accordingly. I belong to the second class. I am accustomed to the retaining of a certain outer appearance, and this habit has grown so strong within me that it has finally become natural. But you see, when you travel on a very hot day with a friend, there come moments to the most refined gentleman when he unbuttons not only his coat but his waistcoat. I am experiencing such a moment now, I am unbuttoning myself."

"This means—"

"This means that I am astonished at the information just gleaned that some one, any one, could fall in love with my wife to be, who, as you once maliciously gave me to understand, is a cold, cruel creature, an automaton in her words, thoughts and movements, as if she were wound up by a key. It's all true, and I confirm it. I do not want you to consider me a greater scoundrel than I am in reality. I do not love my bride, and my wedded life will be as dull as she is herself. I loved Panna Plavitski who rejected me, and I am about to marry Panna Kraslovska for her money. If you say that this is dishonest, I will answer that this is the road taken by thousands of so-called respectable men, whose hands you shake daily, who live, if not in luxury, at least in comfort. They are lame, but they walk on with the procession. After awhile to their assistance comes the growing habit,—years lived down; children that come to this world conscious of no wrong; and thus it will go on to the end of time. Such marriages form the majority, for the most people prefer to walk upon the even graded pavement rather than to climb mountains. Frequently there are marriages much worse, for instance when the woman wants to soar high up in the air and the man is content to crawl in the mud. There can be no question of harmony then. As to myself, I have toiled and labored all my life. Descending from an impoverished family I longed to forge my way out of the gutter. Had I been imbued with the modest desire to remain an unknown beggar and hoard money, I might have succeeded in saving enough to open widely before my son and heir the portals of society. But I cherish no love for my chil-

dren still unborn. I long to have not only ample means, but to be somebody, to occupy a prominent position in our social life. The result was that the earnings of the lawyer were spent by the Pan, because his position demanded that style of life. Ergo!—I have no money. I am tired of the constant struggle to borrow here and pay there, and *vice versa*. I will marry Panna Kraslovska, who gives me her hand simply because I am to all appearances a great Pan, or at least make-believe to be one, dabbling in law as a matter of pastime.—The chances are even, no one is wronged or deceived, or, if you prefer it, we are both deceived to the same extent. This is the whole truth, and now, you may despise me, if you wish to.”

“I have never had a greater respect for you than at this moment” replied Polanetzki feelingly. “I am astonished not only at your bluntness, but at your daring, at your gall.”

“I accept your compliment as a sincere expression, but where does the gall come in?”

“Because you do not deceive yourself in regard to Panna Kraslovska, and are still ready to marry her.”

“Because I am more clever than stupid. True, I sought a dowry, but do you presume for one moment that for the sake of a dowry alone I could marry the first woman possessing money? Not at all. In marrying Panna Kraslovska I know exactly what I am doing. She has her own virtues, indispensable under the circumstances under which she becomes my wife, and under which I am to be her lord and master. She will be a cold, unpleasant, sour aye, even haughty wife, if she does not fear me to offset this. She is like her mother, a religious woman, it matters not whether sincerely or for form’s sake. This is one point in her favor. Then she is pedantic, she has not in her the germs that produce the sorceress, the adventuress, the woman of a certain type. I may not be happy with her,—but I surely will be at ease, and who knows, but this is not the maximum of our demands from life! To you, my dear fellow, I give the same advice. If you have decided to marry, think of your future state of mind, of your peace, above everything else. In a mistress look for what-

ever you please : sense, cleverness, temperament, poetical inclinations, sensitiveness, impressiveness ; but with a wife one must spend a lifetime, look for something on which you can rely, look for solid foundations."

"I never thought you a dullard, but now I see that you are even much cleverer than I thought you were."

"You see, our women, for instance, those of the financial world, are brought up on French novels, and do you know with what result?"

"I know it more or less, but you are so eloquent to-day that I am quite willing to hear your version of the matter."

"She becomes to herself a goddess, a stern law."

"And for the husband?"

"A chameleon and a drama. Yes, this is a common occurrence in the financial world, void of all traditions. There everything is founded on show, on appearance, on the toilet, under which there rests not a soul, but an elegant animal. But this rich and graceful world, always amusing itself, permeated with artistic, literary, and even religious, dilettanteism, holds the baton and directs the choir."

"We are not so bad yet."

"Probably not. If there are exceptions in our midst, there must also be some beyond us. We possess other women—Panna Plavitska, for instance. I can imagine what tranquillity, what happiness, what bliss, life promises for the man who marries such a woman! Unfortunately, she had not been created for such as I."

"Listen, Mashko. I was always ready to recognize your apparent abilities, but I never suspected you were an enthusiast."

"No wonder! I loved her, and am now going to lead to the altar Panna Kraslovska."

The last words Mashko uttered with evident malice, after which silence ensued.

"And so, you refuse to be 'best man,' " asked he after a prolonged pause.

"Give me time to think."

"Within three days I will leave Warsaw."

"And whither, pray?"

"To St. Petersburg. I have business there. Will probably stay there about two weeks."

"Then you shall have my answer on your return."

"All right. To-day I will send you a description of my timber, in three different shapes and measurements. Anything to avoid payments now."

MASHKO took his leave. A few moments later Polanetzki, having made his toilet, went to his office. After a brief consultation with Bigel he determined to buy the timber on his own risk. He could not himself very well explain why he wanted to get a foothold in Kremen once more. He finished his daily labors in the office, his head still full of thoughts of Mashko, and his opinion of Marinya. Polanetzki felt that Mashko's words had the ring of truth about them, that life with a woman like Marinya could not only be one of ease and tranquillity, but also a continual chain of blissful moments, days and years.

At the same time, the conviction grew within him that Marinya's grave error and all the heartpangs originating therefrom was the fact that she did not love him at once with a love absolute and sincere, that access to her heart was to be gained only when duty furnished the key. He did not wish to love, and still wondered when his love began to wither, that it was more intense when Marinya was beyond his reach, than now when she was so kind and winsome.

"It finally leads to," thought he, "that a man knows not where he is, what he wants, and to what he must hold on to; in other words he reaches that state when he's only fit for the devil! Panna Plavitski possesses more virtues than she knows herself; she is pure and pretty, and my thoughts are all riveted on her, but at the same time I feel that Marinya is for me no longer what she has been, that something in me tore itself away and vanished."

"But what?"

"If it's the ability to love, then I reached the conclusion

long before this that love is a stupid occupation, and excessive love absolutely absurd. Then I ought to rejoice at it, yet I am not content. . . I am agitated, excited, wretched. . . Then it must be presumed that it was the temporary relapse ensuing after a surgical operation, or after a grave disease. That positive life will in due time fill up this gap of emptiness."

And that positive life for him appeared in the form of his "commercial house."

In the restaurant at noon, he found Vaskovski. Two waiters were significantly watching the old man raise the fork to his mouth, stay its progress halfway, become thoughtful and unconscious of his surroundings and whisper to himself. Indeed, a short time since the professor acquired the habit of talking to himself, often so loudly that people on the streets halted to look at him. Now his blue eyes gazed unconsciously at Polanetzki. Suddenly he awoke as if from a profound slumber, and continued in his thought, just born in his dazed brain.

"She declares that it will unite her with the child."

"Who declares?" asked Polanetzki.

"Panni Chavastovska."

"In what manner?"

"She intends to enter the convent."

Under the burden of this information, Polanetzki remained speechless for some time. He could ponder to his heart's content on everything in creation, torment himself and others with philosophical vagaries about diseased thoughts of society to which he belonged, but in his soul there were the shrines of two saints: Lida and her mother. Lida was fast becoming a dear reminiscence, while he still loved Panni Chavastovska with a brotherly feeling.

He found no adequate words, and finally, looking severely at Vaskovski, remarked:

"Are you urging her to this? I do not care to delve and dig into your mysticism, nor into your ideas from beyond a dark planet, but know ye that on your conscience her blighted life will heavily lie; that she has not the necessary physical strength to be a nun, that she will die before the year is over. Do you understand?"

"You're wrong in passing hasty judgment before lis-

tening to my explanations," replied Vaskovski. "Have you ever thought of the significance of the saying: 'a righteous man?'"

"When it concerns the fate of one of my friends, I care not a straw for all your 'sayings.'"

"She spoke to me about it yesterday, when I expected it the least, and when I put the question to her: 'Do you feel yourself strong enough to bear this burden, for the duties of a nun are many indeed?' she smiled and said: 'Make no effort to dissuade me. I've made up my mind, that this is my only refuge and happiness. If I prove to be weak, acceptance shall be denied me, and, if accepted, I shall fall under the heavy burden of the task, I will join Lida, for whom my soul longs and pines.' What could I say in reply to this simple determination? What could you say? Who dares to make the assertion, that Lida exists no more, that life—in perpetual labor, in charity, in self-sacrifice, and death—in Christ, cannot, will not, bring her to Lida? Find for her another form of consolation, if you can. Give her a glimpse of hope, calm her with another fair promise, but how? But then, you will see her yourself, and therefore I boldly and frankly put the question to you: Will you dare to dissuade her?"

"No," curtly answered Polanetzki and paused. After a while he added: "Nothing but disappointments, nothing but worry from all sides!"

"Still she might be told," continued Vaskovski, "that instead of becoming a Sister of Mercy, whose task is beyond her slender physique, she might choose a nominal, passive nunnery. There are such convents and monasteries, wherein the poor human at once centers on God and ceases to live its own life, and consequently ceases to suffer."

Polanetzki waved his hand.

"These things are Greek to me," he said brusquely, "I do not understand them."

"That is just why I brought with me a pamphlet in the Italian language," said Vaskovski unbuttoning his coat. "This pamphlet treats of the Nazarethiennes. But, strangely enough, I don't know where it vanished to. I must have left it on the table on leaving the house."

"Your Nazarethiennes do not interest me a bit."

Vaskovski, searching in his pockets for the pamphlet, unbuttoned also his waistcoat, meditated awhile, then said: "What was I looking for? Oh, yes. I know--the Italian pamphlet . . . In two days I am going to Rome . . . for a long, very long time. You remember, I told you that Rome was the threshold to another world . . . Yes, it's time for me to go to God's waiting-rooms . . . I wish Emilya would go with me to Rome. But she will not leave the child's grave, and will remain here—a Sister of Mercy. May be the rules of the Nazarethiennes would have pleased her . . . She is so fair, so simple, as the first of the Christian women . . . Yes. I leave soon—not with my head, my dear, there are men there more clever than I am, men who know what to cling to; but with my heart, a little man, but loving, loving, my dear."

"Professor," remarked Polanetzki, "button your waistcoat."

"All right. In a minute. You see, I have something on my heart, which I would like to disclose to you, but you are hot-tempered, quick as running water, though not without a soul. Some philosophers think that Christianity is at its end, but it is not only not ebbing, but is just at present on its first half of the tide . . ."

"My dear professor," said Polanetzki, a little softer, "I will willingly listen to all you may have to say, but not to-day. To-day I think only of Emilya, and tears are choking me . . . This is a real catastrophe."

"But not for her . . . As life, so death will do her good."

"Really," grumbled Polanetzki, "not only every feeling more or less strong, but mere friendship is sure to wind up now-a-days in some bitter disappointment. Never did any affection with me end in any other way than in some calamity. Bukatzki is right: "At all affection—misery laughs the loudest."

And such is life!"

The conversation was interrupted or rather, gave place to a monologue of Professor Vaskovski, who discoursed with himself of the beauties of Rome and of Christianity.

After dinner they went out together into the cold and frosty street, where the sleigh-bells were merrily ringing.

Everything was full of gay winter-bustle, for since morning considerable snow had fallen, and towards evening winter weather, clear and frosty, greeted the promenaders.

"Button your waistcoat," suddenly said Polanetzki, noticing that Vaskovski went out into the cold air with waistcoat open.

"All right. I will."

And Vaskovski began to push the buttons of his coat into the button-holes of his waistcoat.

"I love this Vaskovski!" said Polanetzki to himself on his return home. "Had I been more deeply attached to him, however, some evil would surely have come upon him; such is my fortune. Happily, I have been until the present day indifferent to the old man's fate."

But Polanetzki deceived himself. He had felt a sincere affection for Vaskovski, and was profoundly interested in the latter's welfare.

When he reached his home and opened the door of his cabinet, the face of Lida smiled to him from a large picture sent in his absence by Marinya. The sight of Lida touched Polanetzki to the very depths of his soul. He frequently experienced such sensations. Every time he thought of Lida or gazed upon one of her pictures, he became excited. Then it seemed that his love for the child, buried in his heart of hearts, revived again with a living force, pierced his whole being with greater emotion and compassion. This renewal of pity was so painful to him that he tried to avoid it, as a man avoids real torture. In this moment, however, there was something unusually sweet and atoning in his excitement. Lida smiled to him in the light of the lamp, as if wishing to whisper: "Pan Stach." Around her dainty little head, on a white background, glistened the recently painted four birch trees—the work of Marinya. Polanetzki halted near the picture, gazed at it long and earnestly, then said thoughtfully: "I know the real source of happiness—it's children: only I shall never love my own, as I loved her," added he after a short pause.

In the meantime the valet handed him Marinya's letter, sent with the photo. He read: "At the request of papa, I beg of you to come to us this evening. Emily has re-

moved to her own apartments and prefers to pass the day in solitude. I send you herewith a picture of Lida, and ask you again to come without fail. I wish to speak to you about Emilya. Papa also invited Bigel, whom he will entertain. We will not be disturbed."

At the appointed hour Polanetzki went to the Plavitski's. Bigel was there, playing a game of cards with Plavitski; Marinya was seated at a small table at some distance from them, busy with her work. Polanetzki bade them all good-evening, and sat down beside Marinya.

"I am very grateful to you for the picture," he began. "I had not expected to see Lida, and she suddenly appeared before my eyes. I could not for a long time take my eyes from her. . . . You know, such moments serve as the measure of that pity, which you cannot define. I thank you . . . very much . . . also for the four birches. As to Emilya, I learned of her intention from Vaskovski. What was it; only an intention or a firm decision?"

"More probably the latter," responded Marinya.

"And what do you think of it?"

Marinya looked at Polanetzki, as if waiting for his advice.

"Her strength will fail her," said she.

Polanetzki was silent for some time, and then helplessly waved his hands.

"I spoke in a similar vein to Vaskovski," said he. "I reproved him because I thought it was he who first broached that plan, but he assured me that he had nothing whatever to do with it, and even asked me to find some other consolation for her, but I could find no answer." "And, indeed, what is there left for her in life?"

"Yes, you are right," replied Marinya.

"I do not understand how she came to entertain that idea? She is prone to outrage her religious feelings, and hopes to die soon. She is aware herself that the labor will be beyond her power of endurance, and still she is willing to sacrifice herself."

"True," added Marinya, and bent her pretty head so low over her work that Polanetzki could only see her dark hair. Before her on the table stood a box filled with

beads, which she used for decorating various objects intended for charity, and now into this box of false gems dropped the precious tears of the young girl."

"I am afraid your effort is futile—I can very well see your tears," said Polanetzki.

She raised her moist eyes as if she wished to say: "before you I will not conceal my grief," and said: "I know that Emilya means and acts right, but I am so sorry for her! . . ." At this Polanetzki, perhaps on account of his excitement, or because he knew not what to do or say, for the first time in his life grasped her hand and kissed it, and the gem-like tears flowed more abundantly until finally she was compelled to rise and leave the room.

Polanetzki approached the card-players at the moment, when Palvitski, with visible irritation, but politely, said to his partner: "Rubicon after Rubicon! What would you do? You are the representative of modern times. I stand for old traditions, and therefore must be beaten."

"This has nothing to do with the game," phlegmatically replied Bigel.

Marinya soon returned and announced that tea was ready. Though her eyes were still somewhat red, her face was full of repose. When, after tea, Plavitski and Bigel sat down once more at the card table, Polanetzki resumed his conversation with Marinya in a quiet, confidential tone, such as is used mostly by intimate friends having great interests in common. True, this interest was the death of Lida and the calamity of Panni Chavastovska, and their conversation was, consequently, not a merry one; nevertheless, her eyes, if not her lips, smiled on Polanetzki—now sadly, then joyfully.

Polanetzki departed late in the evening, and Marinya, thinking of him, mentally referred to him as "Pan Stach." He returned home in a better mood than ever before since the death of Lida. Pacing his room, he frequently halted before the child's picture, looked at the four birches and thought that the knot by which Lida had joined him and Marinya was drawn closer and tighter every day by some mysterious force.

He also thought that if he lacked the former eagerness to strengthen this knot, he also lacked the courage to cut

it in twain with one blow, especially now, so soon after Lida's death.


It was late the same night when he began to examine the description of the forests sent by Mashko. From time to time he erred in his calculations, seeing before him nothing but Marinya's head bent low, and her tears falling into the jewel-box.

On the following day he bought from Mashko the oak forest of Kremen on conditions very favorable to himself.

CHAPTER III.

Two weeks later Mashko returned home from St. Petersburg, perfectly satisfied with the turn in his own affairs, and brought news which he claimed to have received from reliable sources—news no one heard before! It was to the effect that the grain crops promised to be a failure! In some districts a famine was feared, and it could easily be conjectured that toward spring the entire amount of grain held in reserve would be exhausted; that a bread famine would become general throughout the empire. Owing to this, wise heads predicted that exportation of grain would be prohibited. Mashko arrived with the echo of these rumors, vowing that he obtained them from competent persons. This circumstance made Polanetzki do some thinking. He locked himself in his room for several days, and, armed with a pencil, began to make calculations. This resulted in his proposal to Bigel to invest all the capital within their reach, as well as the credit of their commercial firm, in the cornering of bread-stuffs. Bigel at first took fright at this daring proposition. But it was always thus with him at the beginning of every new enterprise. Of course, Polanetzki did not conceal that this operation must be performed on a large scale, that upon it depended the success or failure of the firm, who would thereby profit tremendously, or find its ruin.

A positive, absolute crash was, however, not to be feared, while success would enrich their firm and make them personally very wealthy. It could be safely foretold that, owing to the lack of grain, the prices would take a jump upward. Polanetzki foresaw it all with as much clear-sightedness as a man with his temperament could do; but even Bigel, regardless of his cautiousness and prudence, was forced to confess that the prospects of large gains



were very bright; that it were a pity, indeed, to miss such a golden opportunity.

After several conferences, Bigel's opposition began to weaken. Polanetzki's plan was adopted, and within the following few days the general agent of the firm, Abdulzki, was sent out with the power of attorney furnished by the firm to draw contracts for grain ready for the market, as well as for the incoming crop.

Abdulzki was soon followed by Bigel himself, who went to Prussia. Polanetzki was left alone at the head of the large concern. He labored from morning till night; he shunned society, and received no one.

Time flew unnoticed, for he was animated, inspired by the hope of large profits and the prospects of a wider field of action in the future.

Deciding himself to plunge into this speculation, and dragging Bigel into it, he felt assured of its ultimate success. But another thought occupied his mind at the same time: Their commercial house, together with all its transactions, was a narrow field for his sphere of activity, for his abilities and energy, and he was perfectly conscious of it. It was the principle of the firm to buy cheaply and sell at an advanced price,—to deposit the money in the bank, and begin anew. This was its only aim and goal, the purchase on its own risk, or agency for others, and no more. Polanetzki fretted and fumed in the harness.

"I would like," he thought during the moments of his dissatisfaction with Bigel, "to dig into something, to mine, to manufacture. We, speaking properly, produce nothing, and from the flow of gold that passes through our hands, we direct only one little streamlet into our own pocket." And he was right. His dream was to acquire a fortune, to come into possession of a large capital, and then put his gold and brains into some work, which would create for him a large field for activity and invention. Now, it seemed to him, the rare opportunity presented itself, and he grasped it, as it were, with both hands.

"I will think of the rest later," said he to himself.

"The rest," to him, was another name for the troubles of his heart, soul, his relations to religion, to mankind, to

woman. He clung to the conviction that whoever wished to remain at peace with life had but to make clear to himself all those relations, and then gain a firm foothold. There are men who never during their entire career know what they represent, whom every wind sways, now to this, then to the other side. Polanetzki did not desire to be one of these. In his present mood he foresaw that these questions can be solved. I want to see clearly, whether or not, I am compelled to do something, said he to himself. In the meantime he worked, and saw but few people.

Notwithstanding his urgent labors, he ceased not to visit Panni Chavastovzka, but often he found her absent, and once encountered in her apartments Panni Bigel and both Kraslovzkis, whose presence greatly confused him. At last, when Marinya declared that Emilya would in a few days begin life in her new sphere, he went to take his last farewell. He found her perfectly composed, and even gay; but at the sight of her his heart was oppressed with pain.

Her face was transparent, and in places looked as if chiseled from alabaster. On the temples through the skin were visible the blue veins. She could safely be called an unearthly beauty, but at the same time extremely pitiable; and Polanetzki painfully thought: "Evidently, this is the last time I will take leave of her, she will not live more than three months. From this affection will spring a new misery, another bitter regret."

She began to speak to him about her decision, as if it were a very ordinary affair, which is self-understood, and is merely a natural consequence of what had previously happened; a refuge from life, deprived of all foundations. Polanetzki understood that it would be idle to dissuade her.

"You will remain here in Warsaw?" asked he.

"Yes; I wish to be near Lida. The Mother Superior promised me that at first I shall remain in the home of the Sisters; and after, when I become acquainted with my duties, I will be appointed to one of the local hospitals. I will be at liberty to visit my Lida every Sunday."

Polanetzki closed his teeth, but said not a word; he

gazed mutely at that waxen face, the thin hands, and thought: "Can it be possible that these thin trembling hands will attempt to make bandages to help the sick and wounded?"

But at the same time it was clear to him that she strove for something else. She wished undoubtedly that Death would come, without help from her, not for her sins, but as a reward for her virtues, a reward for her tortures, for the loss of Lida, whom she craved to join in that happy land that already smiled on her.

Those were heavy days for Polanetzki—the last visits and leave-takings. He was deeply attached to Panni Chavastovska, and he felt that the thread that united them had snapped, that their paths had parted forever: He to pursue his way along the path of life; and she, hoping that her life would soon burn out like a camp-fire, had chosen a mission, blessed and noble, but beyond her feeble strength and which would shorten life and hasten the hour of death.

This thought sealed his lips with silence. However, at the last moment, the devotion of long years overcame all other feelings, and with sincere compassion, he kissed her hand.

"My dear," began he, "my dearest. . . God guard you from evil, may He in His mercy console and cheer you!"

Words failed him, but she, still holding his hands in her own, added:

"Till my last breath I will not forget him who loved Lida so well. I learned from Marinya that my little one, before her death, united you two, and I hope that your day of happiness has come, or else God would not have inspired the dying cherub with that noble thought. And whenever I will meet you in my future life, I will always think that your happiness is the work of Lida. God bless you both!"

Polanetzki made no reply, and on his return home, thought: "The will of Lida!" She does not even admit the possibility of that will being ignored. But how could I tell her at that moment that Marinya was no longer to me what she had been before?"

However, he felt that this could not last long—that the

chain which joined him to Marinya had either to be broken at once, or become stronger and closer, in order to end that strange, unnatural state of affairs, these constant misunderstandings, those cares and annoyances that tormented him. But to cut it all short quick action was essential: hesitation was dishonest. And a new tantalizing disquietude seized him: it seemed to him that no matter what he did, how he acted, the loss of happiness would be the penalty.

At home he found Mashko's letter, containing the following: "I have been here twice to-day. A certain demented individual insulted me in the presence of my creditors, making vile insinuations about my sale of the oak forest. This maniac's name is Goutovski. I must speak to you and will come again to-night."

And, indeed, before an hour had elapsed, Mashko appeared, and not taking off his overcoat, asked Polanetzki:

"Do you know Goutovski?"

"I do. He is a neighbor and relative of the Plavitskis. What happened?"

Mashko took off his coat, and then replied:

"I do not understand how he ever got the information about the sale. I spoke to no one about it, and naturally could hardly do so."

"Our agent Abdulzki went to Kremen to inspect the timber, and, I presume, in some manner, let the news leak out."

"Now, listen, what has happened." To-day I was handed the card of Goutovski. Not knowing him, I ordered the valet to let him in. In comes a burly scamp, with the direct question on his lips: is it true that I sold the forest, that I intend to sell Kremen in parts for colonization purposes! Instead of a reply, I asked him whether it was any of his business. Suddenly he shoots out: "You are under obligations to pay the Plavitskis an annuity for life, and if you manage Kremen in a piratic fashion, you will ruin the estate, and you will be forced to the wall." Of course, I advised him most politely to take his hat, to button his coat and make his bow. This led him to indulge in choice adjectives, in the presence of some of my creditors, calling me a scoundrel and a scheming swindler, and wound up by saying that he resided at

the "Hotel Saxon." With this and a parting volley of abuse he departed. Will you not be kind enough to find the key to this puzzle, and do you know what it all means?"

"I do. First, Goutovski is a very rough and ignorant man; second, he has been in love with Panna Plavitski a number of years and wishes to be her knight-gallant."

"You know that generally I am very cool, but at times I think it all a dream, that I should have permitted a man to heap insults upon me, because, forsooth, I disposed of my own property. It is beyond all endurance."

"And what do you intend to do with him! Plavitski will be the first to box his ears and compel him to apologize."

At this Mashko's countenance assumed such a cold, wicked expression, that unwillingly Polanetzki thought: "the bear has made a mess of it, and will have to swallow it now."

"No one has ever insulted me during my life without having been justly punished for it," replied Mashko. "You see that I am speaking composedly, coolly, therefore listen to me: Ruin stares me in the face, after which I will never be able to rise to my feet again."

"Though you look cool, rage is choking you,—and you are exaggerating matters."

"Not a bit. Listen to me patiently. My condition is such— if my marriage is broken, or delayed for a few months—everything is lost: my position, my credit, my Kremen—in short, all I possess. I told you before that I am riding on the remnants of lost power and I must soon halt. Kraslovska marries me, not because she loves me, but because she has seen twenty-nine summers, because I am a sufficiently good match for her. And if it should appear that I do not represent in reality what she expected of me—the affair will be off in an instant. Had these women known that I sold the forest for want of immediate cash, my rejection would have followed immediately. Now, judge for yourself: the scandal was in public, in the presence of my creditors; you cannot hide a darning needle in a bag. Let's admit for argument's sake that I could prove that the sale of the timber had nothing to do

with my finances, the result remains just the same. If I don't challenge Goutovski, respectable people may deem themselves justified to cut me forthwith, as a man without honor. If I do challenge him, those dear ladies of mine might bang their doors before my very face. If I kill Goutovski, they will flee from me as from a murderer. If I am wounded, they will shun me as a poor weak fool, who allowed himself to be insulted by the first rowdy, and could not avenge his insult. It is a hundred chances to ten that they will act just as I have said. Now you will understand why I said that everything would be lost: my position in the world of finances, my credit, and, in addition, my Kremen. . ."

Polanetzki waved his hand with the egoism of a man toward another, who does not in the least interest him.

"Well, as to Kremen, I might, perhaps, take it back from you," said he, "at all events, the position is a deucedly disagreeable one. What do you propose to do with Goutovski?"

"You see: up to this very moment I have paid my debts promptly," replied Mashko, "you refused to be my best man, will you not be my second?"

"Such honors are not declined."

"Thank you. Goutovski can be found in the 'Hotel Saxon.'"

"I will call upon him to-morrow."

Mashko went away. A few minutes later Polanetzki went to Plavitski.

"One had better not indulge in jokes with Mashko, though he cannot be indifferent to this affair, yet it does not concern me; what am I to them or they to me? However, I am devilishly lonely in this world!"

"And suddenly he felt that there was one being that thought him a good respectable man, and that one being was Marinya."

And he was right. No sooner had he entered their house, than he was convinced by the mere pressure of her hand that it was true. Her voice as she greeted him was full of caressing tenderness:

"I felt that you would come," said she, "and here, as you can see, your cup stands waiting for you—tea is ready."

CHAPTER IV.

POLANETZKI found at the Plavitskis' Pan Goutovzki. The young men exchanged a cold greeting. There was not a more miserable man that day in the whole world. Old Plavitski, as was his custom, made fun of him and his manners, being in a merry mood, owing to the death of his female relative from whom he expected to receive a large inheritance. Marinya was visibly confused by his presence, although she made every effort not to betray it, and Polanetzki made believe that he did not see him at all. It was evident that Goutovzki had not mentioned a word to Plavitski about his encounter with Mashko, and now trembled lest Polanetzki should make this the theme of his conversation. Polanetzki divined his purpose at once, as well as his own advantage over the "bear," which advantage he intended to make capital of in behalf of Mashko, but he was silent on the subject; and wishing to punish the jealous Goutovzki, was amiability itself with Marinya during his prolonged visit. Leaving Goutovzki to the care of Plavitski, they marching gaily up and down the parlor, then they sat down on the sofa by the palm tree, and discussed Panni Chavastovska's entrance into the convent of the Sisters of Mercy.

At times it seemed to Goutovzki that only a betrothed couple could chat in such an intimate manner, and in those moments he felt something akin to what an erring soul might feel in purgatory—even worse—for such a soul may still hope for salvation, as a soul that enters the gates bearing the inscription: "*Lasciate ogni speranza*," "Abandon hope all ye who enter here." Seeing them together he conjectured, not without some grounds for it, that Polanetzki, whom he considered very shrewd, induced Mashko to sell the timber together with the land it grew on, so as to save even a small part of Kremen—the dear old

place that she lamented as lost forever, the only nest that held for her all she loved in the days of her youth.

The slightest thought of this and the row with Mashko set his hair on end. Plavitski, listening to his tactless, or or altogether irrelevant answers, laughed at the provincial who lost his presence of mind in the city. Himself, Plavitski considered a man of the world, and sneered the more at him.

It happened that Marinya left for the dining-room to prepare tea, and Plavitski went to his room for a cigar. The young men remained together.

"After tea," Polanetzki said, "we'll go out together; I desire to speak to you about your quarrel with Mashko."

"All right," Goutovski returned sullenly, perceiving that Polanetzki was Mashko's second.

However, they had to remain for a while after tea. Plavitski, not disposed to go to bed so early, invited Goutovzki to a game of chess. Marinya and Polanetzki sat down together, and held quite an animated conversation, to the great discomfort of the "little bear."

"You are, probably, very pleased at the arrival of Pan Goutovzki," remarked Polanetzki. "He reminds you of Kremen."

There was an expression of surprise on Marinya's face. She thought that, in virtue of a tacit understanding between them, Kremen was never to be recalled in their conversation.

"I don't think any more of Kremen," she said. Deep in her heart she felt an intense craving for the place of her childhood, where she worked so many years and cherished her hopes. But in virtue of her feeling toward Polanetzki, which she felt grew stronger every day, she studiously avoided the mention of that town.

"Kremen," she rejoined, "was the cause of our misunderstanding. And I would have undisturbed happiness with you now."

Saying this she cast at Polanetzki a charming, coquettish glance.

"However, she is very kind," mused Polanetzki.

"You possess a powerful attraction. With your kindness you can lead me wherever you will—even into hell."

Marinya shook her head.

"I have no wish to lead you thither."

Polanetzki, looking at her smiling face, could not help thinking:

"Whether I love her or not, there is no other woman who attracts me as much."

In fact, he never liked her as much as now; not even when he was sure of her love and suppressed his feelings.

Meantime, it grew late. He took his leave, and was soon on the street with Goutovski.

Polanetzki, who could not control himself, stopped the unlucky "little bear," and almost defiantly demanded:

"You knew that I bought the forest in Kremen?"

"Well, yes. Your agent, a Tartar, I think, has communicated it to me."

"If you knew, why did you pick up that row with Mashko?" Polanetzki retorted, pressing him to the wall.

"Now, have the goodness to stop squeezing me," replied Goutovski. "I don't like it. I injured him and not you, for you don't owe anything to Plavitski. He has to pay yearly the sum agreed upon in the contract; if he ruins Kremen he will have nothing to pay with. Now do you see why I raised that row?"

Polanetzki confessed inwardly that Goutovski was partly right, and he continued the conversation in a different tone.

"Pan Mashko has invited me to officiate as his second," he said,— "that is the reason of my meddling in this affair. To-morrow I will formally call on you—as a second; but to-day I, as a private individual, and somehow related to Plavitski, must declare to you the following: If Plavitski and Marinya remain without a morsel of bread, it will be due to you. Yes, sir!"

Goutovski's eyes opened wide.

"Without a morsel of bread!" he uttered, "and I the cause of it!"

"Yes, sir!" repeated Polanetzki. "Hear me. Whatever the consequence of your quarrel,—and it must be deplored—you ruined Plavitski and his daughter—you deprived them of all means of existence.

Though Goutovski did not relish very much being

pressed against the wall, yet he now got close to it, he lost his head, and stood there with mouth wide open, not knowing what to say.

"How? How is that?" he murmured. "O no! You may be sure it will never come to that,—never, even if I have to give them my own Yabrijikow."

"Don't waste words!" interrupted Polanetzki. "I have known your farm since my childhood. I know Yabrijikow and its worth!"

It was true. Yabrijikow was a small estate with more debts attached to it than there were hairs on Goutovski's head, the debts were hereditary. Now he stood in dismay.

Suddenly the thought crossed his mind that perhaps the state of affairs was not so hopeless as Polanetzki would have him believe. He clung to this thought with the tenacity of one drowning.

"I don't understand it," he exclaimed. "I take Heaven to witness that I would rather ruin myself than the Plavitskis. I would readily wring Mashko's neck, but if it concerns the Plavitskis I'd sooner go to the devil. After the scandal I went to Yamish;—he came here for the court session. I confessed to him everything, and he also disapproved. If the result of this affair were confined to myself alone, I would not move a finger; but now I'll do just as he advises me, even if they hang me afterwards! Yamish stops at the Saxon Hotel; I also stop there."

With these words Goutovski left in the direction of his hotel, cursing himself, Mashko, and Polanetzki. He knew that Polanetzki told him the truth, that he had done something extremely irrational and injured Marinya, for whom he would willingly shed his last drop of blood. He was conscious of a great calamity that deprived him of his last hope concerning Marinya: Plavitski will now close his doors to him, and Marinya will marry Polanetzki—unless Polanetzki himself does not want her. But who can reject such a girl! Goutovski clearly saw that among the aspirants for her hand he must necessarily take a back seat. "What have I?" he asked himself, "wretched Yabrijikow, and that's all: neither talent nor money. I am ignorant and valueless. Take Polanetzki: he is educated, rich . . . and as to my greater love for her, who

is the happier for it, if I am such an accursed fool, that instead of assisting her I harm her."

Polanetzki going home thought the same of Goutovski. He had no compassion for him. Entering the room he was met by Mashko, who had been awaiting him there over an hour.

"The other second will be Krasovoki," Mashko said. Polanetzki frowned.

"I spoke to Goutovski," he returned.

"Well?"

"O, he is simply a jackass."

"Well, did you tell him anything in my name?"

"No. I spoke to him as a relative of Plavitski to whom he thinks he rendered such a good service."

"You did not explain anything?"

"No. But listen to me, Mashko. You want complete satisfaction. Well—I don't object if you do blow out each other's brains. But, thanks to my warning, I expect he will agree to all your terms. Fortunately he looks to Yamish as his adviser, and this latter is a reasonable man; who also thinks that Goutovski acted absurdly, and will readily deliver to him an appropriate lecture."

"Very well," replied Mashko. "Give me a pen and paper."

"There they are on the table."

Mashko sat down and began to write. After a while he handed to Polanetzki the following epistle:

"I hereby acknowledge that in a state of drunkenness and irresponsibility, I assaulted Mashko, and muttered things of which I could not give myself an account. To-day, being sober and in my senses, I recognize my actions as mad and rough—this in the presence of all witnesses, my own as well as Mashko's. I now appeal to Mashko's wisdom and kindness, beg his pardon, and confess that his treatment of myself is just."

"This paper must be read aloud and signed by Goutovski," said Mashko.

"Well, this is too much! Nobody could agree to that."

"You realize that this rogue's conduct has been something extraordinary?"

"I do."

"You comprehend what a bearing this scandal is likely to have on my affairs?"

"I am ignorant of that."

"Well, I know, and let me tell you frankly, those ladies regret very much their connection with me, and they will embrace the very first opportunity to rid themselves of me. This is certain, and I am ruined."

"And so you perish!" sneered Polanetzki.

"Yes, sir. Now you understand that the affair cannot be hushed. Goutovski must satisfy me in some form for the affront."

Polanetzki shrugged his shoulders.

"I do not at all sympathize with him; therefore, let it be as you will."

"To-morrow, at ten o'clock, Krasovski will call on you."

"All right."

"And so—good-day. By the by—if you see Plavitski, tell him Ploskovska, his relative, has died in Rome. He expected an inheritance from her. The will is with the notary-public Podvoyny; it will be opened to-morrow."

"Plavitski has learned already about it. She died five days since."

Polanetzki was left alone. The question of how to get his money from the insolvent Mashko troubled him very much. Then he recollected that the whole sum could not be lost, and that, at the worst, he would again become Plavitski's creditor. Though the paying capacity of Kremen was no better than Mashko's, he had to abide by it.

Now, different thoughts occurred to him. He recalled Lida, her mother, Marinya. Now he discovered how different is the world of women—created for love and happiness—from that of men, replete with rivalry, struggles, duels, strife for riches and power. At this moment he felt that if there exist in this world rest, tranquillity and happiness, one must seek for the mamong loving women. But this idea conflicted with his late philosophical principles. However, comparing the two worlds, he came to the conclusion that the feminine world,

loving and soothing, has its own foundation and aim in life.

If Polanetzki were more familiar with the Holy Scripture, he would recall these words: "Mary hath chosen the good part."

CHAPTER V.

KRASOVSKI was late a full hour. He was a man of a certain type found among us. He lived in idleness, and possessed a considerable fortune. This, together with some popularity he enjoyed, made his position in the world secure. He was considered worthy of confidence, and his advice was sought in the most delicate matters. People turned to him for arbitration; in matters of honor he was considered invaluable. He had access to the highest financial spheres; his presence was sought at dinners, weddings, christenings and on similar occasions, for he was the happy possessor of a patrician bald-head, thoroughly Polish countenance, and an ability to do justice to the meals.

In reality, he was a man disappointed in everything, irascible, but not deprived of a certain humor, which enabled him to note the comical side of the most trivial things, not excluding his own irascibility. He would even allow others to be jocose on his score, but only moderately. If anybody went too far, he would stand up defiantly, and was considered, therefore, dangerous. He was credited with great presence of mind and courage. He respected nobody and nothing, except his own noble physiognomy.

Coming up to Polanetzki, he at once began to explain the cause of delay.

"Did you ever observe that when one is in a hurry he will be sure to miss some necessary thing? The servant goes for the hat, can't find it, looks for the rubbers, not there. And this just when one is in haste."

"Yes, this happens," returned Polanetzki.

"I even invented a remedy for this evil; if something is lost, I sit down, smile, and say loudly: 'I like sometimes to miss a thing; one becomes animated, runs around, seeks, kills time, and this is so pleasant and

healthy.' And what do you think? The thing appears as if by magic."

"Such an invention should entitle you to a monopoly. However, let us talk of Mashko."

"We will have to call on Yamish. Mashko has sent to me a written acknowledgment, which Goutovski must sign, and he will not change a single word in it; but it is too humiliating, impossible, and cannot be accepted. Certainly, a duel awaits us—there is no other issue."

Goutovski leaves it to Yamish, and will do his bidding. Yamish is also dissatisfied with Goutovski, being sick, and naturally of a peaceful disposition, who knows but he might yet agree to the conditions."

"Yamish is a sluggard," retorted Krasovski. "However, it is time for us to go."

And they went. Yamish, though expecting the visit, received them in his dressing-gown, for he was really sick.

Krasovski, gazing at his intelligent but shriveled and sunken countenance, thought:

"Indeed, this man will agree to everything."

"Take a seat, gentlemen," said Yamish. "I came here three days ago, and, though sick, I am heartily glad to see you. Together, perhaps, we will be able to adjust this affair. Believe me that I was the first to censure him."

He shrugged his shoulders, and then turned to Polanetzki:

"Well, how are the Plavitskis? I have not called on them yet, though I long to see my dear Marinya."

"She is well," returned Polanetzki.

"And how is the old man?"

"Expects to receive a legacy from a dead relative, but I hear that she left everything to charitable institutions. To-day or to-morrow the will is to be read."

"It would be fine if heaven inspired her to leave something to Marinya. However, let us to business. It is superfluous for me to mention that it is our duty to settle the affair peacefully."

Krasovski nodded impatiently. He was heartily sick of these introductions, which God knows how many times in his life he had heard.

"We are well impressed with this sense of our obligation," he returned.

"And so I thought," good-naturedly rejoined Yamish. I acknowledge that Goutovski had no right to act as he did; therefore, it is my own wish that he should be properly punished. I will yield to everything that may satisfy Mashko's honor."

Krasovski took out of his pocket a folded paper and handed it with a sneer to Yamish.

"Mashko demands," he said, "that Goutovski shall read this certificate in the presence of Mashko's and his own witnesses, as well as in the presence of all those persons that were at the disturbance. He also wants him to sign his honorable name under this testimony."

Yamish looked for his eyeglasses among the papers on the table. He found them at last, and, putting them on, he began to read. As he read, his face became suffused with redness, and then suddenly it grew pale; he breathed heavily. Polanetzki and Krasovski could not believe their eyes that before them was the same Yamish, who a moment ago was ready for all concessions.

"Gentlemen!" he exclaimed abruptly, "though Goutovski acted as a turbulent squabbler, he is, nevertheless, a nobleman. This is my reply in his name to Mashko."

He deliberately tore the paper into fragments and scattered it on the floor.

This was unexpected. Krasovski now meditated whether he himself as a second was not insulted by Yamish's action. In an instant his face assumed a frigid expression and began to wrinkle like the face of a cruel dog. Polanetzki enjoyed this indignation.

"Counsellor," he returned, "Mashko, in fact, is greatly injured, and must demand of Goutovski complete satisfaction. But Krasovski, as well as I, foresaw your answer, and it only made our regard for you more profound."

Yamish sat down, and, suffering with his asthma, breathed violently.

"I could have offered a retraction on Goutovski's part in another form, in different expressions, but I see it would be in vain; I decided, therefore, to terminate the affair. Vilkovski, Goutovski's other second, will be here

in a moment. If you can wait a while, we will then consider the conditions of the duel."

"This I call going directly to the point," replied the conciliated Krasovski.

"Yes, out of necessity, and a very sad necessity," returned Yamish.

Polanetzki looked at his watch.

"At eleven o'clock I must be in my office. With your leave, I'll go and be back at one o'clock to look over and sign the agreement."

"Very well. I assure you beforehand that the conditions will be such as not to cause laughter, but I also expect that you and Krasovski will not make them extreme."

"As to this you need feel no anxiety. I will not be headstrong."

Polanetzki left. Some very urgent business matters awaited him in the office; in Bigel's absence he had to dispose of them himself. At one o'clock he repaired again to Yamish, and signed the articles governing the duel. From there he went to the restaurant for his dinner, expecting to meet Mashko.

The latter did not appear; he was evidently at Kraslovski's. Instead of him he found Plavitski, who was, as usual, elegantly dressed, clean-shaved, but as gloomy as night.

"What are you doing here?" asked Polanetzki.

"Well, whenever something disagreeable befalls me, I don't dine at home," returned Plavitski, "so as not to grieve Marinya. I always go away—a little wing of a capon, a spoonful of dessert—that's all that I need. Be seated, if you don't seek gayer company."

"What has happened?" demanded Polanetzki.

"What I always claim: old traditions perish."

"Well, this is not such an overwhelming calamity to you!"

Plavitski cast at him a sad but also triumphant look.

"To-day, the will was made public."

"Well, what of that?"

"What? They now say throughout Warsaw, 'she remembered her remotest relatives.' Well, did she remember? To Marinya she left, do you know how much?

An annuity of four hundred roubles. Millionaire! . . . In such a manner servants are remembered, but not a relation."

"And how much to you?"

"Not a kopeck. She left to her manager fifteen thousand, but about me not a syllable! . . . Yes, sir, traditions perish. In times past how many enriched themselves by bequests! And why? Because solidarity reigned among relatives."

"But I know of some who inherited big sums."

"Yes, there are some lucky fellows, but I don't belong to that number."

Plavitski leaned against the table and gave utterance to the following soliloquy:

"Always and everywhere, somewhere. . . to somebody . . . someone . . . and something."

He sighed deeply and rejoined:

"And to me, never . . . nowhere . . . nobody . . . nothing."

A wicked and foolish fancy occurred to Polanetzki; he made use of it to cheer up Plavitski.

Well, she died in Rome, and the testament was made out here and long ago. I heard there was another will executed before this, and, who knows, perhaps we will get from Rome another testament by which you will suddenly become a millionaire."

Plavitski hopelessly shook his head.

Nevertheless those words enlivened him somewhat. He began to fidget in the chair as if he sat on needles, and, at last, exclaimed:

"You think it is possible?"

"I see nothing impossible in that," returned Polanetzki with a roguish smile.

"If Heaven willed it."

"Everything is possible."

Plavitski looked anxiously about him. Finding nobody else in the room, he abruptly pushed away the chair and pointing to his breast, exclaimed:

"Come to me, my boy! . . . Let me embrace you! . .

Polanetzki bent his head, which he kissed twice. He then touchingly said:

"You encourage me, my dear. Let it be as Heaven wishes it. Now I confess that I had written to her certainly, to remind her of myself. Of course, the letter was written under a reasonable pretext. I inquired, when the lease of one of her estates terminated. You understand, that I had no intention of renting it. . . Thank'ee! You support and encourage me! This testament might have been written before the receipt of my letter; then she went to Rome, may have thought about it and us on her way. Now you say there might be another will. . . Thank'ee! May God's blessing descend upon you!"

In a moment he beamed with joy; suddenly clapping Polanetzki on the knee and smacking his tongue, he said:

"Do you know what, boy? Perhaps you really told the truth at a lucky moment. Why not have a bottle of "Mouton-Rothschild" on account of the coming legacy?"

"No, I can't," returned Polanetzki, who felt some compunction for this roguish trick. "Really, I cannot and will not."

"You must."

"Upon my honor, I cannot. I have some business to attend to and would not, therefore, cloud my head."

"You are a stubborn brick, upon my word. I'll myself drink in honor of the happy day."

He ordered the wine.

"What work have you got there?"

"Various matters. After dinner I must see Professor Vaskovski."

"What kind of a bird is Vaskovski?"

"He also has received an inheritance from his brother, a mine owner. It was a considerable sum. . . He distributes it among the poor."

"Distributes all, and himself in these restaurants. . . I love such philanthropists! If I had anything to give away, I would renounce everything."

"He was ill a long time, and the attending physician advised him to partake of the best food. But in the restaurants he orders only cheap dishes. He lives in a cell and raises chickens. There are two large rooms adjacent to his cell, and do you know who lives in them? . . . Children that he picks up on the streets."

"It appeared to me from beginning that he was a little. . ." and he pointed to his forehead.

Polanetzki did not find Vaskovski in. He called on Mashko, and about five o'clock went to see Marinya. He was vexed with the suggestion he made to Plavitski. "Now the old man will drink expensive wines on account of the coming riches,"—he thought. "They have lived long enough beyond their means. There must be an end to it."

He found Marinya with her hat on; she was going to the Bigels'.

"I congratulate you on your inheritance," he said.

"Indeed, I am very glad. It is something tangible, and with our present means this is important. Besides, I want to be very rich."

"Why?"

"You once expressed a wish to possess sufficient money wherewith to open a factory and give up the commercial firm. I kept it in mind, and now I want to be rich."

It occurred to her that she said too much and spoke too clearly; the thought suffused her cheek with a blush, and to hide it she began to smooth the folds in her dress.

"I came once more to excuse myself. . . At dinner to-day, among other absurd things I mentioned to your father the probability that Ploshovska might have changed the will and left to him the whole estate. Unfortunately, he took it seriously. I don't like the idea of his laboring under such an impression. With your leave, I will go to him now and endeavor in some manner to dissipate his hopes."

Marinya laughed heartily.

"I have explained to him already, but he only scolded me. Now you see what you have done. Yes, indeed, you must beg our pardon."

"And I do."

Polanetzki grasped her hand and covered it with kisses. She did not take it away, and, somewhat agitated, she repeated smilingly:

"Wicked Pan Stach, wicked Pan Stach!"

During the whole evening, Polanetzki felt the warmth of Marinya's hand. Mashko, Goutovski, everything, was plunged into oblivion.

"Yes, it is high time to decide!" he murmured again and again.

CHAPTER VI.

KRASOVSKI with a doctor and a brace of pistols were in one carriage, Polanetzki and Mashko in another. They rode in the direction of Byelyani. The day was clear and frosty with a rosy mist near the ground. The wheels creaked on the frozen snow, the horses fumed and were covered with frost, and hoar-frosted boughs hung down from the trees.

"This is weather for you," grumbled Mashko. "The fingers will freeze to the triggers."

"And it will be so comfortable without the fur-coats."

"Well, then, have the kindness to dispatch everything as quickly as possible. Tell Krasovski not to dally."

Mashko wiped his glasses and added, "the sun will rise before we get there, and the snow will glitter."

"Well, it will soon come to an end," returned Polanetzki. "Since Krasovski is in time, we will not have to wait for the others; they are early risers."

"Do you know what is in my mind now? I think of our helplessness against human folly; this latter is a powerful factor. Let us suppose I am not Mashko with his puny interests, but a man ten times as wise, a great statesman, a Bismarck, a Cavour. Fancy me working out a great plan destined to change the face of the world. I need money to realize it, and theoretically I have prepared the ground. Everything is calculated, foreseen; apparently no possibility of a hitch. Suddenly a jackass comes along, and the whole edifice tumbles. It's outrageous! I am not bothered with the thought whether I will be shot or not, but he has spoiled the work of my life."

"Well, who could foresee! It is the same as if a cornice suddenly fell on your head while you were peacefully taking a stroll. It is possible."

"Just on that account I cannot smother my rage when thinking of this affair."

"Well, there is slight danger of your being killed."

Mashko wiped again his glasses and continued :

"I am conscious, my dear, that since our departure from home you have been studiously scrutinizing me. You wish to encourage me. That is natural. For my part I can assure you that I will not disgrace you. It's natural that I should be excited, and do you know why? To shoot one another—this is nonsense—mere fun. Give us pistols and let us get in the forest. I could shoot at that fool for half a day, also stand his aim. I have had some experience. I have been in duels before this, and I know what it means. What annoys me most is the whole farce of preparations, witnesses, the thought that you will be stared at, and the fear, whether vanquished or victorious, how you'll behave. This is a public début, pure and simple, the verdict of the fate your own vanity. For nervous natures this is a complete revolution. Fortunately I am not very nervous and understand that I possess all the advantages over my opponent, because I am more accustomed to people and their traits than he is. Such an ass as he undoubtedly is, can scarcely imagine, I trow, how he would look as a corpse, how he would decay, etc. I am certain to be cooler than my antagonist. . . . Besides, in such cases one must remember, that philosophy is philosophy, but the question of life is not decided by temperament and passion. A duel never decides anything, never saves anything, it only adds to the volume of tribulations. Nevertheless I cannot deny myself the pleasure. . . . In my heart there is accumulated so much hatred for that ass, that I am ready to crush him, to destroy him, etc. I know not myself what else to do with him. Rest assured that as soon as I behold his face, I will forget my restlessness, this farce and everything else. I have eyes for him alone."

"This is self-evident," said Polanetzki.

Mashko's face, from the severe cold, became blue and even black which gave it an expression of extreme wickedness, and made him look uglier than he was.

At last they arrived at the place of meeting. At the

same time they heard the creaking of the wheels of the carriage that brought Goutovski, Yamish and Vilkovski, who greeted the opponents; then all seven, including the physician, went to the most secluded spot of the forest, selected as the meeting place by Krasovski.

The drivers, watching the men making their way through the snow, winked to each other significantly.

"Do you know what's going to take place here?" asked one.

"Nothing new, my lad. I've been here before," replied the other.

"The fools! . . . They're going to shoot one another."

Meanwhile the duelists, with their seconds, scarcely able to drag their feet through the deep snow, slowly approached the selected spot. On the way Pan Yamish, contrary to the rules of duels, approached Polanetzki and said: "I would like to induce Goutovski to apologize before Mashko, but in this case, it's impossible.

"I have also prevailed upon Mashko to alter the tone of what he had written, but he stubbornly declined."

"Nothing can be done. Though it is all ridiculous there's no escape."

Polanetzki was silent, and they walked on. But Yamish remarked again: "I've heard that Marinya Plavitski was mentioned in the will. A snug sum?"

"No, a very insignificant one."

"And the old man?"

"Nothing, and he is in a white rage, because the whole estate was not willed to him."

"Oh! there's something wrong with him." He looked around him.

"Why are we going so far?" asked he.

"We will be there presently."

They walked on, the sun rose over the underbrush, the blue shadows of the trees were resting on the snow, and a dim light broke through the forest. Hidden in the tops of the trees, the awakening crows shook the snow from their feathers, but not a cry, not a voice, broke the profound silence, save now and then from the men who were on a bloody mission. At last they halted at the farthest end of the forest. The opponents listened to the brief

speech of Yamish, who declared that a bad peace was better than a good quarrel. Then Krasovski loaded the pistols. The opponents selected each his own weapon, cast off their heavy fur coats and took their positions, one facing the other. Goutovski breathed heavily. His face was red, his moustache wet and freezing. From his whole manner one could judge that he acted unwillingly, that he was prompted by the sense of shame, that, had he followed his own inclination and desire, he would have attacked his antagonist with the butt of his pistol or with his bare fist. Mashko who previously pretended not to see him, began to look at him, with hatred, malice and contempt. He controlled himself more than did Goutovski, and, clad in his surtout, with a high hat, and long flowing side-whiskers looked the very image of an actor rehearsing a duel scene on the stage.

"Mashko will shoot down the 'little bear' like a puppy," thought Polanetzki.

At this moment the command to fire was given, and two shots rang through the air. Mashko turned to Krasovski, and said coldly :

"Reload the pistols!"

At the same time a pool of blood formed around one of his legs.

"You are wounded," announced the physician, approaching him.

"May be . . . reload the pistols."

But at the same instant his whole body swayed ; he was wounded, indeed the bullet had torn away a piece of his knee-cap. The duel was declared at an end. Goutovski remained in the same position, with bulging eyes, seemingly astonished at the result. And, after the physician had finished his examination of the wound, he went forward to the wounded man. He was pushed by Yamish, and evidently sincere, he said in a stammering voice : "I confess now that I had no ground whatever on which to base my accusations. I take back my words, and humbly beg your pardon, and, if I wounded you, it was accidental."

A minute later he disappeared with Yamish and Vilkovski.

"Truly and honestly," protested Goutovski, "it was a mere accident. Such pistols! I believe I intended to aim above his head."

All through that day Mashko uttered not a word, and to the question of the physician, whether the knee pained him much, negatively shook his head.

Bigel, who returned the same day from Prussia, his pockets filled with contracts, said to Polanetski, on learning of the occurrence:

"Mashko is undoubtedly an intelligent man, yet, upon my word, there seems to be something lacking in the head of each and every one of us. Take him for instance. He is a capable man, has his hands full of various paying transactions, and a small fortune would surely have been his, had he striven for it; but he jumps and runs in all directions, piles up debts, buys estates, plays the nobleman, a lord, forsooth, and wants to be somebody, but not what he is in reality. Of course, all this fails to connect, and puzzles me the more, because it is so vulgar, so commonplace. I often think that life, for its own sake, is a very good thing to stick to after all; but we cripple it ourselves, owing to the lack of equilibrium in our heads, to the possession of a diabolic phantasy, and an aching void of gray matter in the right places. I understand the common desire to have more than we have, but why strive for it in an unnatural way? I recognize in Mashko shrewdness, ability, energy, but, taking all things into consideration, I believe there is something wrong with him—here."

And Bigel pointed several times, with his finger, to his forehead.

Meanwhile Mashko suffered, and, though his wound presented no genuine danger, it caused intense pain. In the evening he twice fainted in the presence of Polanetski, then he collapsed completely. His pride and vanity, that had buoyed his spirits during the day, broke down, and after a second examination by the physician, he said: "Such is my luck!"

"Do not think of it," advised Polanetski, "or fever may set in and add to your misery."

But Mashko continued:

"Insulted, wounded, annihilated—all at once."

"I repeat, do not excite yourself. This is not the time for such thoughts."

Mashko, raising half-way in bed, leaned with his elbow on the pillow, groaned with pain, and added: "Let me speak! This is the last time I may have the audacity to speak to a respectable man. In a week or two, I will belong to the class of men who are carefully avoided. I am ruined, and every fool may say: 'I knew it, I foresaw it, I told you so!' Yes, they all knew it. They all see it, when it happens. When misfortune strikes a man then they make of that unfortunate, a fool or an imbecile."

Polanetzki recalled the words of Bigel, and Mashko, who seemed to divine his thought, continued:

"You think, probably, that I did not consider what I was doing, that I pushed myself into places I had no business to, that I wished to climb high, that I held my head too high. No one would ever dare to tell me that, but I thought of it myself, and frequently spoke of it. But at the same time I thought that it was best to act in that manner, that it was the only way to reach the desired goal; and what if the result did prove disastrous? Perhaps life itself went wrong. And yet if it had not been for this unfortunate, unforeseen scandal, she would have been mine just because I was such a man. Had I been more modest, I could never have won Panna Kraslovska. In our circles hypocrisy is the best weapon, after all, and if I perish, the fault is not mine, that fool is to blame!"

"But you don't know yet that your marriage will not take place?"

"Oh, my friend, you don't know these women. For lack of something better, they agreed to swallow Mashko, because his affairs went smoothly. And if my position, my fortune, my wealth, is threatened by one stain, ever so small or suspicious, they will cast me aside without mercy, and then will heap on me mountains of malice and mischief, in order to defend their own names from the tongues of gossips. You don't know them. A Kraslovska is not a Plavitski!"

For a moment silence ensued, after which Mashko continued, in a weaker voice:

"The latter could have been my salvation. With her

at my side, I might have traveled on another road, more solid, more peaceful. Under those circumstances, Kremen also could have been saved. Both the debt and the annuity would have been canceled and I would have crawled out on dry ground. But I fell in love with her like a school-boy. I really didn't know why it was, but she preferred to pout and fret at you, than love me. I understand it all now."

This turn of the conversation did not please Polanetzki; he impatiently interrupted him: "I am surprised that you, usually so energetic, should consider the battle lost, when there's nothing visible to that effect. Panna Plavitski sank into the past, over which you yourself built a cross, by becoming the fiancé of Kraslovska. As to your present condition, you certainly have been insulted, disgraced, but you wiped that stain away by the duel. You are wounded, but will be well again in a week. Finally, the Kraslovskas have not told you that they were going to end their relations with you, and as long as you know nothing to that effect, you cannot allude to it as an accomplished fact. You are sick and under the weather, but this is no excuse for reading mass over your own corpse. I have a bit of advice for you. These ladies must be visited and informed of the affair, and, if you wish it, I will call upon them to-morrow. Let them act afterward as they think best, but they shall learn the whole truth from the lips of an actual witness of the affair, and not through the medium of gossip-mongers."

Mashko was thoughtful for some time, then said: "I had intended to write to my betrothed, but if you are going to see her personally, it will be much better. Though I entertain no hope that she will keep her promise, I will do everything that I possibly can. I thank you. You will know how to plead for me. . . . But not a word about my fears. . . . Make the sale of the timber a mere trifle, a courtesy which I wished to accord to you. . . . Thank you most sincerely. . . . Tell them that Goutovski apologized."

"Have you any one to nurse you, to sit at your bedside?"

"The valet and his wife. The physician promised to

bring with him a trained nurse. Though the pain is acute, I am not very uncomfortable, after all."

"And so, *au revoir*."

"*Au revoir*. Thank you for the visit."

"Sleep well!"

On the way home Polanetzki thought of Mashko not without bitterness. "That scamp is not a romantic fool by any means, and yet he deemed himself in duty bound to pretend to be one or something of the sort. . . . He loved Panna Plavitski for the opportunity it would have given him to branch out into a new and wider road, because, in fact, in her there was salvation from threatening ruin and disaster. This was tribute that he paid to sentiment, and it was tendered in counterfeit coin, for within a month he proposed to another, smitten by the charm of her money. It may be that I am stupid, that I do not understand, nor have any confidence in the sincerity of people, who so easily find consolation. To be in love with one and to marry another within a month—I could not have done that, not for the world. However, he is right in his assertion that Marinya is not Kraslovska. There can be no comparison . . . such a wide contrast!"

This thought pleased his vanity.

When he reached home he found on his desk a letter from Bukatzki, written from Italy, and a note from Marinya, full of inquiries about the duel. She begged to be informed the following morning of the results; of the wrangle that caused it, and whether Mashko was in danger. Polanetzki, still under the spell of the thought that Marinya was superior to Kraslovska, penned a very cordial reply, and handing it to the servant, ordered him to deliver the message at about nine o'clock in the morning. Then he opened Bukatzki's letter, and while reading it, shrugged his shoulders. Bukatzki wrote:

"May the divine Sakya-Muni procure for you a blessed nothingness! Besides this, pray tell Kaplaner not to send me at Florence the three thousand roubles due me; let him keep the money until further notice. Some of these days I shall decide to think (note what determination there is in the expression itself) of my intention to remain a vegetarian. If the thought will bring no exhaustion of vital forces,

if my intention shall become an established rule, and this rule void of unpleasant after-effects, I will cease to be a carnivorous animal, and my living expenses will be reduced accordingly. This is the whole story in a nutshell. As to yourself, I would advise you to calm down; life is really not worth laboring for.

"Do you know, long ago I came to the conclusion that the Slavs as a nation prefer synthesis to analysis. Because they are laggards,—and analysis is a troublesome occupation. Synthesis is, on the contrary, a very agreeable pastime, after dinner, when one, with a cigar in his mouth, is bent on killing time. And they do well, these idlers. It's very warm now in Florence, especially at Long-Arno. I am varying my promenades with synthesis of the Florentine school. I formed the acquaintance lately of an aquarillist, himself a Slav, whose soul is wrapt up in his art, who argues that art is a piece of hoggishness, the fruit of the provincial commonplace desire for luxuries, of the abundance of money that creates everything. In a word, art, in his estimation, is a ruffianism, an insult, a wrong! He attacked me—fiercely like a dog, and insisted that to be a Buddhist and indulge in painting—was the acme of absurdity. I repaid him in the same coin by declaring that preferring absurdity itself to its natural consequences was also the climax to provincial parvenue obscurantism, prejudice and scoundrelism. He was stupefied for a time, and lost his power of speech. I advised him to commit suicide by hanging, but the rogue stubbornly refuses. But, tell me, my dearest, are you certain that the earth is really circling round the sun, or is it all a huge joke? Of course, it's immaterial to me!

"Well, how's Panni Chavastovska? People are predestined to perform certain parts in this world. Hers is the part of an eternal sufferer and martyr. Why was she pure and honest? Had she been otherwise, a gay life would have been hers. As to yourself, my dear friend, pray grant me one favor: do not marry! Remember, that if you do, you will have a son, you will toil to leave him a fortune, in short, you will spend your best years for the exclusive purpose of making your son what I am to-day, and, though a very amiable gentleman I am per-

meated with doubts, and not a bit sympathetic or sensitive. Long live audacious energy, long live the commercial houses, commission companies, transient firms, habitual labor, financial schemes, the future paterfamilias, the educator of children, and many worries and trouble! Remember me to Vaskovski. He is also a synthetic. May Sakya-Muni open your eyes, that you may see and learn that in the sun it's all warmth, and in the shade it's cool, that to lie is better than to stand. Your Bukatzki."

"A regular okroshka (hash)!" thought Polanetzki. "All this is artificial affectation, self-deceit, a ridiculous extreme. But once a man becomes addicted to it, it appears natural, and Satan claims everything—brains, energy. The soul decays like a corpse. Then one can throw himself into an ice-hole like Mashko or Bukatzki."

Polanetzki began to pace his room and look at the portrait of Lida, smiling to him from beyond the birches. The desire to draw his own accounts and measure his own worth seized him, and grew stronger and stronger. As a merchant he began with the inspection of his "debit" and "credit". The space allotted for special paragraphs of his life was in former days occupied by his love for Lida. In those days she was so dear to him, that had he been told: "adopt her as your own child," he would not have hesitated a moment. He would have considered her his property, which made life worth living. But now these relations were changed, become a mere recollection, and from the paragraph of "happiness" were transferred to the paragraph of "misfortune." What was left? First, life itself. Second, a mental dilettanteism, which however it might be construed, serves as a luxury. Third, a curiously interesting future; then material benefit, and, finally, the commercial house. It all had its value, but Polanetzki found room for improvement in everything. He was pleased by the stability and success of his firm, but not by the occupation it afforded him. On the contrary, the character of these transactions failed to satisfy him, it betrayed narrowness, and angered him. On the other side, the mental dilettanteism, the books, the scientific world—it all had its specific value as an ornament of life, but could not aspire to become its foundation or its supporting pillar.

"Bukatzki," pondered Polanetzki, "sank into that mire to his very ears, he wished to live in it, but he was put out of joint, weakened, withered. The flowers are in themselves very good, but if one were to breathe their aroma exclusively, he would be sure to poison himself."

And indeed, one need not be very wise to recognize men, weakened, disheartened, whose spiritual health was as much ruined by dilettanteism, as morphine is capable of wrecking one's physical health. He was much injured by it himself—it made him a skeptic. From this grave disease he was saved by a healthy organism, that felt the necessity of an outlet in energy and incessant labor.

But how about the future? If the work in the commercial firm was not sufficient to fill the void in his life, and it were dangerous to fill it with dilettanteism, then another antidote must be found for the germ of ennui, to him another new world must be created, a new horizon opened, and for all this there remained but one way—marriage.

In former days when the same thought tormented him, he saw an indefinite form, combining in itself all the physical and moral qualities and virtues,—a mere figure, nameless, phantom-like. Now this figure was quite distinct: she had blue eyes, auburn hair, a somewhat broad mouth, and styled herself Marinya Plavitski. No other woman was thought of, she seemed to Polanetzki so real, his imagination of her was so vivid, that the veins on his temples pulsated more rapidly. He was conscious that there was something amiss in his present feelings toward Marinya, that something was wanted that craves for nothing, but hopes for the best, that fears, trembles, kneels before the beloved woman and whispers: "everything to your feet;" that out of love consisting of desires, makes a cult based in its turn on adoration, bringing a certain mystic coloring into the relations of man to woman, which makes of man not only a lover, but also a follower. All this flashed through Polanetzki's mind as he thought of Marinya, and his thoughts of her were quite sober and even bold. He understood that it was now within his power to approach her, to woo her, and take possession of her, and if he does the latter it will be for two reasons, first because

Marinya is to him more attractive than all other women he knew; second, if marry he must, she will be his wife.

"She," thought he, "is a positive girl. There is nothing dry, faded, moldy in her nature. Egotism has not succeeded in consuming her heart, and she will not be wrapt wholly in her own self. She is honesty personified. If prudence advises marriage, I will be stupid, indeed, to look for another."

After which came the question: "Will he not be dishonest by leaving Marinya to her fate?" Lida united them, and at the mere recollection of this, a feeling in his heart he could not define demanded the fulfilment of her will. Had he wished to oppose this will, he had no moral right to visit the Plavitskis after Lida's death, to see Marinya, to kiss her hands, to let himself be carried away by that feeling, which perhaps owing to the chain of circumstances, carried him so far that a retreat now would imperil his reputation in the eyes of Marinya, and expose him as a man who knew not what he wanted. Only a blind man could possibly be unconscious of the fact that Marinya considered herself a bride, and if she was not alarmed by his silence, it was only because they both wore mourning.

"And so, from a moral point of view, I must marry her," said he to himself,— "from the point of self-preserving instinct—I ought to do so; common-sense dictates the same,—honesty, ditto. And then, what? The name of scoundrel were just if applied to me, had I deliberately dodged and delayed with the solution of this serious question. Enough! It's settled!"

Polanetzki sighed, and again paced his room. On the table, the light of the lamp fully on it, lay Bukatzki's letter.

Polanetzki took it and began to read from the line—

"Do not marry! Remember, that if you do you will have a son; you will toil to leave him a fortune, in short, you will spend your best years for the exclusive purpose of making your son what I am to-day." . .

"Well, my dear,—you're joking! thought Polanetzki." I will marry, and Marinya Plavitski shall be my wife. Do you hear me? I will hoard money, save a

fortune, and if I have a son, I shall not make of him a failure—do you understand?”

And he was content with himself.

Then he gazed again at Lida's portrait and suddenly became deeply excited. A wave of pity rushed to his heart, and he began to speak to the child, as people usually do in grave matters to dear loved ones, even if they're dead.

“You are satisfied with me, pussy, are you not?” inquired he.

She smiled to him from beyond the birches, as though, replying: “Yes, Pan Stach, yes!”

Tears were in Polanetzki's eyes.

The same evening before going to bed, Polanetzki took from the servant the letter intended for Marinya, and wrote another, more affectionate:

“MY DEAREST—Goutovzki insulted Mashko, and a duel was the result. Mashko is slightly wounded. Goutovzki apologized on the spot. No further consequences are expected, except, perhaps, that I had another chance to convince myself of your kindness, and to-morrow, if you'll permit me, I will come to thank you and kiss your dear little hands. I will come in the afternoon, because in the morning I shall call on Panna Kraslovska, and then bid farewell to Vaskovski; although, if it were possible, I would my day were not begun with them.

“POLANETZKI.”

He sealed the letter, looked at his watch, and though it was already eleven o'clock, he ordered his servant to carry the message to Plavitski at once.

“You will seek admission through the kitchen,” he instructed the servant, “and if the young lady has retired, leave the letter there.”

Once more left alone, he said to himself aloud:

“She will be a very poor hand at guessing not to divine the object of my coming to-morrow.”

CHAPTER VII.

PANNI KRASLOVSKA was amazed at Polanetzki's early visit. However, she received him, having made up her mind that he was urged to this unusual call by some matter of grave importance. Polanetzki delayed not, but approached at once the object of his call, related the incidents of the duel, hiding the truth whenever it was necessary for the defense of Mashko, and the allaying of suspicions regarding his alleged bankruptcy. He noticed that during his narrative the old lady stared at him with her green, colorless eyes, and not a muscle of her face twitched. When he finished, she remarked :

"From all that you have just said, I fail to understand one thing: why did Mashko sell the oaks which adorn the residence?"

"These oaks are quite a distance from the estate," replied Polanetzki, "and injure the field. Owing to the shade nothing will grow thereon. And Mashko is a practical man. In addition, we are old friends, and the sale was a courtesy. You know that I am a merchant; I frequently have a demand for oak timber, and Mashko had been considerate enough to let me have that small square of oak forest."

"Then, on what grounds did that young man insult him?"

"If you are acquainted with Pan Yamish," interrupted Polanetzki, "he, being a neighbor of both Kremen and Yabrijikow, will tell you that this young man suffers from a remarkable lack of brains. This is known to the entire village."

"Then Mashko had no right to fight him."

"Pardon me, madam," replied Polanetzki, somewhat impatient. "In such cases men have different ideas."

"Will you permit me to speak to my daughter?"

Polanetzki thought that it was time for him to leave, but as he had come to the Kraslovskas, not as a friend, but as a messenger of Mashko, anxious to bring him back some favorable news, he said, after a pause :

"If you have any word you wish to send to Mashko, I am going to him when I leave here."

"One second, please. I will at once——"

She went away. Polanetzki remained alone and waited long—so long, in fact, that he began to lose patience. At last both ladies made their appearance.

The girl was dressed in a blouse of navy blue, her hair betraying haste. However, she seemed to Polanetzki quite attractive, notwithstanding her inflamed eyes and rough forehead, unsparingly powdered. There was a certain charm in her face which did not betray the least emotion.

After the customary greetings were exchanged, she spoke in a very cold, calm voice :

"Pray be kind enough to tell Pan Mashko that I was awfully frightened and distressed. Is it true that the wound is slight?"

"Absolutely."

"Tell him that I have persuaded Mamma to go and take care of him. I will escort her every day, and wait outside in the carriage until she brings me a report of the state of his health. I will do it daily until he is well and up again. Mamma is so kind, she will consent to this. Tell him that."

For the first time, on her pale, bloodless face appeared a scarcely visible flush. Polanetzki hardly expected to hear such words from her, and they astonished him. She seemed to him much prettier now, and when, a moment later, he was on his way to Mashko, he thought :

"Women are frequently much better than they seem to be at first. These two are like bottles of frozen water ; and yet, the girl has a heart. Mashko made no study of her. He will make a pleasant discovery some day. The old lady will come to his bachelor apartment, will see his prelates and castellans, with their crooked noses, over which Bukatzki made merry, and will be conquered by the majesty and grandeur of Mashko and his ancestry."

At Mashko's house he was compelled to wait; the physician was dressing the wound. As soon as the latter departed, Mashko impatiently called his friend to him, and without the formality of a greeting, anxiously inquired:

"Well, have you been there?"

"How are you? Did you sleep well?"

"Yes, quite well, but this is not important now. Have you been there?"

"I have, and will make a short story of it: In about a quarter of an hour you will be made happy by the visit of the older Kraslovskaya, who is henceforth going to nurse you back to health. The younger requested me to tell you that she will accompany her mother every day and wait in the carriage for her mother's report. She begged me to tell you, furthermore, that she was frightened, that she is very unhappy, but thanks the Lord that you are out of danger. You see, Mashko! And I will add, that she is not at all bad-looking . . . so winsome . . . well now I must be going . . . my time is limited."

"Wait a moment . . . I have no fever, and if you say this, fearing that——"

"Oh, how dull you are!" interrupted Polanetzki.

"Upon my word of honor I spoke the truth, and you are hasty in condemning your bride."

Mashko dropped his head on the pillow, lay there silent for a few minutes, and then uttered, as if to himself: "I am indeed, almost ready to love her. . ."

"Excellent! Well, good-by. . . I am going to see Vaskovski off."

But instead of Vaskovski, he went to the Plavitskis', whom, however, he found not in. Plavitski spent very little of his time at home.

Marinya, the servant declared, had gone out an hour ago. Usually, when one is going to see his beloved, and on the way meditates and considers what to say to her, and finally comes there only to find her gone, his face assumes a very stupid expression indeed. This happened to Polanetzki. However, he went into a flower store and bought a large bouquet of flowers, which he sent to Marinya. The thought, what joy she will evince at the sight of them, how impatiently she will wait for him in the

evening, gave him infinite pleasure. He lunched in a near-by restaurant, and went to Vaskovski in the gayest of humors.

"I came to bid you farewell, professor," said Polanetzki, "when are you leaving us?"

"Oh—how do you do! . . . I was compelled to postpone my journey for several days, because, you see, I have several boys living with me."

"Gamins that in their leisure moments busy themselves with pilfering from poekets?"

"No, these are all good boys, but they cannot be left without attendance. I had to find a man to take my place and live in my present lodgings."

"A man who will roast himself alive here. . . I do not understand how you can endure this temperature?"

"I am sitting in my shirt-sleeves, and allow me to keep my coat off. True, it is somewhat warm here, but this is healthy; besides, it agrees with my feathery friends."

Polanetzki examined the room, in which there were not less than a dozen and a half of various kinds of birds, not to mention the sparrows, who, evidently trained to eat from the hand, looked through the window. Vaskovski kept in his room only birds which he bought from bird-catchers. The sparrows had no free access to his room, "because," declared he, "there would be altogether too many, and there would arise bad blood among them, if some were to be admitted and others barred out." For the birds hung in innumerable cages on the walls and window-niches, but the cages were occupied only at night, and in the daytime the room was filled with their noisy twitter, while everything, furniture, books, and manuscripts bore the marks of their presence. Some of the birds more easily tamed lighted on his head and shoulders. The floor was covered with the shells of bird-seed. Polanetzki, who was familiar with this scene, shrugged his shoulders.

"This is all very well," said he, "but that you should allow them to sit on your head, to dishevel your hair, to leave their marks there . . . this is too much . . . and then it is warm to suffocation here!"

"Well, for this Saint Francisco D'Assis is to blame," said Vaskovski, "from him I learned to love these crea-

tures. I have also a couple of doves, but they are great simpletons."

Polanetzki changed the trend of conversation. "You will probably meet Bukatzki there," said he, I received a letter from him. Here it is."

"May I read it?"

"I brought it here for that purpose."

Vaskovski took the letter and read it. "I always loved this Bukatzki," said he, "he is a good, generous lad, but there is something wrong with him here." The professor struck his forehead.

"This amuses me!" exclaimed Polanetzki. "Just imagine, professor, that for the last few days almost every man I have had an opportunity to speak to, when commenting upon any of our mutual friends, invariably pointed to his forehead, assuring me there was something wrong with that individual's brain. An attractive society, indeed!"

"But what, if it's true? Indeed, it is!" said Vaskovski, with a smile. "And do you know why? We Slavs have too much of that restless Aryan spirit, in consequence of which neither our mind, nor our heart, has ever been perfect, have never been balanced. I repeat, we are the youngest of Aryans, we are more sensitive, take everything more to our hearts, and are diligently bringing our life to fit the practical idea. I have seen a good deal in my life, and have observed these facts long since. And what strange, peculiar natures! The German students, for instance, drink, and this is not, in any shape or form, detrimental to their work, nor does it prevent them from becoming sober, practical men. But let a Slav acquire that habit, and he will drink himself into an early grave! And so it is in everything. A German will be a pessimist, will write volumes on the question whether life is or is not mere despair, and will continue to drink beer, bring up children, hoard money, water flowers, and sleep under thick covers. Under similar conditions the Slav will hang himself, or will throw himself to the dogs, leading a wild life of dissipation, license, and perish and choke in the mire into which he voluntarily sank. I, my dear, have seen a great many people, who, professing love for

the peasant, drank themselves to death in the village inns, and there ended their wretched life. We have no measure, no limit, because with us every absorption of new ideas is accompanied by frivolity and emptiness. Oh, how empty we all are! With what zeal we strive to forge our way forward, to be seen and admired! Take Bukatzki, as an example. The man is over ears in skepticism, pessimism, Buddhism, decadentism, and God knows what not,—he is deeply sunk into everything, wherein chaos reigns supreme, sunk so deeply that he is being slowly poisoned by their fumes. But do you imagine for a moment that he does pose? Indeed, ours are strange natures,—sincere, sensitive, sympathetic—and at the same time fraudulent,—actor-like. When you think of them, you want to love them, but at the same time to laugh and to weep.”

Polanetzki recalled his words to Marinya on his first visit to Kremen, when he described to her his life in Belgium. He told her of his Belgian comrades in pessimism. That he took matters more to heart than they, that it ruined his life.

“Yes, it’s true,” replied he. “I have seen such things, and that is why the devil will take us all!”

But Vaskovski fixed his mysterious eyes upon the frozen pane, and added: “No, some one else will shelter us. All this heat of blood, that faculty of absorbing ideas, is only the great basis for that mission which Christ predestined for the Slavish race.” Whereat Vaskovski pointed to a manuscript, besmeared by the birds, and mysteriously continued: “You see, I am going away with this. This is the labor of my whole life . . . If you wish, I will read——”

“No, I have no time. It’s getting late.”

“Yes, true. It’s twilight. I not only think, I am almost certain, that the Slavish race will fulfil a great mission.”

He rubbed his forehead, as if trying to recollect “What a wonderful number three is,” said he. “There is so much of the mysterious in it.”

“But you wanted to speak of a great mission,” remarked Polanetzki, alarmed.

"Yes; it's closely connected with it. You see, we have three worlds in Europe: The Roman, the Teutonic or German, and the Slavish. The first two have already solved their respective destinies,—the last.—This is a question of the future."

"What will it do?"

"Social relations, rights, relations of man to man, the life of individuals, and what we call private life—it is all based on Christian doctrines; and though human weakness undermined this foundation, it is still firm and safe. We have, however, accomplished the first half of our mission—passed the first period. There are men who think that Christianity is at its end. No; this is not true. Now the second period is about to begin. Christ is embodied in the life of individual men, but He is not to be found in history—do you understand? To bring Him into history, to base on Him our relations, to create the love for your fellow-men in the historical sense—this is the mission which the Slavs will have to accomplish. They are not sufficiently familiar with its scope. Their eyes must be opened; their attention called to this great problem."

Polanetzki was silent, not knowing what to answer.

Vaskovski continued: "This has tortured my brain during the whole length of my life, and to this I gave utterance in this manuscript. It is the labor of a lifetime, and therein the mission is pointed out."

"On which, in the meantime, the birds will perch," thought Polanetzki, "and so it will be for a long time to come."

"And you think," said he aloud, "that when your work sees the light of day, then——"

"No; I am not thinking of anything, nor do I cherish hopes. Though I am vain to a certain extent, yet I am too shallow, and my mind is small. It may all be lost like a stone cast into the water, but it will muddle the clear water, and make circles. Maybe there will be found a leader. I know one thing: one is destined; must come. It will not be within their power to reject this mission, even if they were so inclined. Human nature cannot be torn away from its destiny, nor alter it. What might

be good in another clime, is not good for us, because God created us for another mission. And, finally, all our labor is fruitless. And even you are vainly convincing yourself that your sole aim is to hoard money. On the contrary, you, too, will follow the better voice of your nature and destiny.

"I am going there now, for I am going to marry—that is, *I* will—if I am wanted."

Vaskovski embraced him.

"Ah, 'tis well. God bless you! I know that you are doing it to comply with the will of the dead child. Do you remember that I told you the child would not die before she fulfilled her mission? God grant peace to her soul in His heavenly kingdom, and may He bless you. Marinya is a golden treasure—not a maiden."

"Permit me to wish you a happy errand and the speedy accomplishment of your mission."

"I wish you the best you wish yourself."

"What do I wish?" gaily asked Polanetzki, "about half a dozen little missionaries?"

"Oh, you ruffian! Well, go, go to her. I will also join you—go on."

Polanetzki went out into the street, called a cab, and gave the driver Plavitski's address. His mind was busy composing a speech, partly sentimental, partly sober, one befitting a positivist who found what he sought for, who married on the inspiration of his own mind.

Apparently Marinya expected him to come much later, for the rooms were not lighted, though the last rays of the sun had long since disappeared beyond the mountain-tops.

Polanetzki greeted her warmly, kissing both her hands, and, forgetting his speech, inquired in a hesitating, somewhat excited voice:

"You received the letter and the flowers?"

"Yes."

"And of course guessed why I sent them?"

Marinya's heart throbbed so violently, that she found no answer. In view of which, Polanetzki continued to question her, excitedly and abruptly:

"Are you willing to abide by the request of Lida? Will you marry me?"

"Yes," replied Marinya.

Now he found himself in the same position as Marinya. He knew that he ought to thank her, but he could find no words, and only kissed her hand. At the same time drawing her nearer and nearer to himself, until he was finally overmastered by such a passion, that he longed to kiss her lips. But she turned only her face and he kissed only her hair and temples. In the twilight there was heard only their breathing. At last, Marinya freed herself from his embrace.

A few minutes after the servant brought a lighted lamp into the room.

Polanetzki becoming more composed was frightened at his own audacity and gazed in alarm at Marinya, thinking that he had offended her with his conduct; and was on the point of apologizing. But to his amazement he noticed not a sign of annoyance on her face. She sat with drooped eyes, flushed cheeks and partly disheveled hair; it was evident that she was confused, lost, bewildered, but filled with the fear of a loving woman, who crossing a new threshold, feels that she must bring upon it some sacrifice; that she crosses it, because she wishes to, because she loves, that she must cross it, because she recognizes the rights of man.

Polanetzki's heart filled with gratitude. It seemed to him now that he loved her intensely as he did before Lida's death—once more he took her hand and pressed to it his lips.

"I know," said he, "that I am not worthy of you, but I will do for you all within my power."

Marinya gazed at him with moist eyes.

"If you were only happy!" was her reply.

"Can any one help being happy with you? I was conscious of this from the first moment of our meeting in Kremen. But then, as you know, everything went wrong. . . . I thought you were going to marry Mashko, and was sadly disappointed."

"Yes. I was very angry, and I now humbly apologize to you . . . my dear. . . . Stach. . . ."

"Only this morning Vaskovski told me, that you were a golden treasure, not a girl," exclaimed he in ecstasy,—and 'tis true,—everybody says the same, not only gold, but something more precious, dearer. Very much dearer."

"Only perhaps a very heavy treasure, burdensome," said she, smiling with her tender blue eyes."

"Well, let this not worry you! I have sufficient strength to carry it. Now, at least, I have some one to live for."

"And so have I."

"Do you know that I have been here before to-day? After my first unsuccessful visit I sent you the chrysanthemums. After the receipt of your letter last night I said to myself that you were an angel, that one must have no heart, no mind, not to decide this question at once."

"I was exceedingly worried about the outcome of the duel. But now it's all over, is it not?"

"Yes, it's all over."

At this moment Pan Plavitski entered the house. They heard his peculiar dry cough. Taking off his coat, and leaving it with his cane in the hall, he opened the door, and, seeing them together, he said:

"So you are both alone here?"

Marinya ran to meet her father, put her hand on his shoulder, and, receiving his kiss on her forehead, replied:

"Yes, papa, we're here all alone, a betrothed couple."

Plavitski made a step backward.

"How—what did you say?" asked he.

"Like groom and bride," replied she, calmly looking into his eyes. "Stanislav is my betrothed . . . and I am happy . . . so happy!"

Polanetzki approached father and daughter and embraced the old man.

"Yes, if you, uncle, consent to our union," explained he.

"My child!" exclaimed the old man, going with wavering step to the sofa, and sitting down. . . "Allow me, I am so agitated, but do not heed me . . . and if my blessing is wanted . . . my children, I bless you from the depths of my heart."

And he blessed them, thereby becoming still more excited, for his love for Marinya, at least, was genuine. He seemed to have lost his voice, and the young couple could

only hear fragments of phrases, like . . . "some modest corner under your roof . . . for an old man who has toiled his entire life . . . only child . . . orphan."

The young people quieted him, and in the course of another half hour Plavitski was of merry mood. Then he suddenly rapped Polanetzki on the shoulder, and said: "Ah, you ruffian—you! After all, it seems that you always thought of Marinya, while I despaired, fearing that you did a little . . . you know."

He bent over to Polanetzki's ear, and whispered something, the nature of which made Polanetzki blush.

"How could you think of that," with mock indignation, retorted Polanetzki. "Had I been told this by any one else but you, I . . ."

"Well, well, well," laughed Plavitski, "there's no smoke without fire."

The same evening, Marinya, bidding good-night to Polanetzki, said:

"Will you grant me one little favor?"

"What are your orders?"

"I often thought that if we should ever become betrothed, that we would go together to visit Lida's tomb.

"Ah, that's it!"

"I know not what people will have to say about this," she continued, "but what are they to us? Am I not right?"

"Of course . . . of course! their opinion is of no importance whatever. I am very grateful to you for this truly noble idea, my dearest, my—Marinya. Somehow I always imagine that she looks at us and prays for us."

"Yes, she is our good angel."

"Good-night!"

"Good-night!"

"Till to-morrow!"

"Till to-morrow," echoed Polanetzki, kissing her hand, "till day after to-morrow, till, till the wedding," added he in a whisper.

"Yes," was Marinya's response.

Polanetzki's mind, as he went home that night, was a bewildering chaos of thoughts, emotions and impressions, over which reigned supreme the consciousness that some-

thing extraordinary had happened, something final, decisive; that his fate was sealed, that the time of wavering, hesitating had passed, that now he must turn over a new leaf. This feeling enchanted him; it contained a certain species of intoxication, especially when he kissed the hands, hair and temples of Marinya. This was *that something* that was sadly wanted in his feelings. He felt that he had found, at last, the one thing essential for perfect happiness. I will never *tire* of this, never feel *satiated*, thought he; this seemed to him impossible.

Marinya was as positive a girl as he was a man, he could safely build plans for his future happiness on her heart and character. With her, in constant, blissful peace, he had nothing to fear. She would trample under foot no sacred principle, but consider golden, what was gold for him, for she would live for him, not for herself. And immediately there came the natural question: Could he ever find anything better? He marveled at his former hesitation. He felt, however, at the same time, that the future, which was in store for him, was such a big contrast, such a decisive change, that in the depth of his heart, in some forlorn nook, there awoke a fear. But he wavered not. "I am not a coward, nor a weakling," he reassured himself. "I must advance—forward—and—I will!"

At home he gazed once more at the portrait of Lida, and suddenly a new world opened before him. He thought that he might have children, dear little creatures, with light golden hair, like Lida's, and with Marinya for their mother! At the very thought of this, his heart beat faster, and to his feeling of exultation was added a courage and energy he never had experienced before. He felt and looked the picture of happiness. Accidentally, his wandering glance fell upon Bukatzki's letter, which he had taken out with other papers from his pocket before going to bed. The sight of it called forth from the happy man such a loud, healthy, vigorous laugh, that his servant rushed into the room, and stopped amazed on the threshold. Polanetzki felt a desire to tell him of his luck, but controlled himself, and said nothing. He fell asleep toward morning, but awoke refreshed. He dressed rapidly, and was

at his desk earlier than usual, to impart the glad news to Bigel. The latter embraced him. Then phlegmatically considered the question from all points of view, and finally said :

"Taking everything into consideration, I must say that you are doing very well, very sensibly, indeed." He pointed to the batch of papers on the table, and added: "These contracts are all good, but your enterprise is still better."

"Is it not true ? replied Polanetzki, not without pride.

"I will inform my wife at once, then you are at liberty to make your way to her . . . I will take your place in the office till your wedding, as well as during your honeymoon."

"Very well. My first visit shall be paid to Mashko, then with Marinya, we will pay the next to Lida's grave."

"Yes, this debt of gratitude must be paid her."

Again Polanetzki almost looted a flower-store, sending the choicest of its stock to Marinya, with a note saying that he would soon come himself ; then hastened to Mashko, who felt much better, though burning with impatience for the appearance of Panni Kraslovska.

Mashko heard the news of Polanetzki's betrothal with apparent equanimity. But as he warmly shook his hand, he said, not without emotion : "I know not, whether she will be happy with you, but you will be, most assuredly, with her. Women are so much superior to us. I hope that after all that has occurred, you share the same opinion of the gentler sex. I confess, that up to this moment I can hardly compose myself from utter astonishment. Women are better and more mysterious . . . Just imagine—"

Mashko paused, undetermined.

"Imagine what ?" asked Polanetzki.

"Yes," continued Mashko, "though you are a man of discretion, yet you gave me so many proofs of your friendship, that I will be candid with you. Imagine, that yesterday, after your departure, I received an anonymous letter—(you know that the noble custom of writing such letters exists here)—from which I learned that the father of Panna Kraslovska—the husband of her mother,—is too much alive—and feeling splendidly."

"Another invention."

"And perhaps the truth. He is alleged to reside in America. I was handed the letter in the presence of Panni Kraslovska, but I did not mention the matter to her, and only when she examined the portraits on the wall, and made annoying inquiries about my pedigree, I asked her how long she had been a widow. She replied that she and daughter were alone in the world for the last ten years, that theirs was a sad history, upon which she did not wish to dwell just then. Notice, she did not state directly when her husband died.

"And what do you think of it?"

"I think, that if he is really among the living, he is a man of whom it is charitable not to speak, that their history, is indeed, a sad one."

"But this secret must also be known to others."

They spent more than nine years abroad, and who knows? At any rate, this does not in the least affect my intentions. If Pan Kraslovska enjoys life in America and has no desire to come back, he must possess some weighty reasons for remaining there, therefore it matters not that he is still alive. On the contrary, this gives me all the reason to hope that my wedding will take place as originally arranged, for people "who have niggers in their own wood-pile" are not apt to be very exacting."

"Pardon my curiosity," said Polanetzki, taking his hat, "but I am anxious about my money. I am also interested now in the fate of the Plavitskis. Are you positive that the Kraslovskas are wealthy."

"I will be candid. I believe they have an ample fortune; but of course, with me it's a matter of risking all and staking everything on a blind card. The amount of their fortune must be considerable, for her mother frequently repeated that her daughter will not be dependent on the wealth of her prospective husband. I saw an iron safe; they live on a broad scale, in luxury one might say. I know most of the usurers in Warsaw who advance money on estates, and am almost positive that none of them has any claim on the ladies in question. They own, as you know, a splendid villa, adjoining that of Bigels . . . They do not live on their capital. They are too shrewd for that."

"Then you have no idea of exact figures?"

"I made several efforts to procure an approximate estimation of it, but, not being sure of my ground, I deemed it best not to be too inquisitive. However, they dropped several hints to the effect that their fortune reached the 200,000 roubles mark, and in the near future will exceed that."

Polanetzki bid Mashko good-morning and speedy recovery, and going to Plavitski's thought . . . "All this is mysterious, juggling, dark, risky. No, I prefer my Marinya."

Half an hour later Polanetzki, accompanied by Marinya, drove up to the cemetery. The day was warm, but the gray town looked gloomy and dirty. In the cemetery the thawing snow fell from the trees, while from the top of the tombs, water flowed in tiny streams and was driven by a warm wind into the faces of Polanetzki and Marinya. Strong gusts played havoc with their clothing, impeding their progress; several times they were compelled to stop before reaching Lida's grave. Here, too, everything was wet, oozing, and bare from the thawing snow.

Polanetzki's mind could not at first adapt itself to the painful conviction that the child once so beloved and petted, now lay in that dark and damp vault.

"All this may be quite natural," thought he, "but we cannot become reconciled to death."

The sombre, disagreeable day increased the bitterness of his feelings. On his former visits to the cemetery, it seemed to him like some great "nothing" in which vanished not only life, but with it misery, "something" sleepy and lulling. To-day there was no trace of that solemn repose, snow dropped from the stones and crosses; midst the moist trees crows cawed. Sudden gusts of wind carried the wet snow from the trees, which swayed and bent low, presenting a desperate struggle amid the immobile and spotless granite monuments.

Marinya finished her prayers, and said in a voice that awoke a dull echo.

"Her soul must hover around and with us."

Polanetzki was silent. He thought that he and Marinya were creatures of two different worlds, and then he mentally added, that had her assertion contained but one

grain of truth, all his spiritual and mental disputes and struggles would vanish, melt away like the thawing snow.

"Under such circumstances," said he to himself, "there may exist dying, cemeteries, but there is no death."

Marinya in the meantime decorated the grave with immortelles and evergreens bought at the gate, while Polanetzki thought:

"In my world there is no response to anything, there are only whirling wheels, which whirl till they fall into an abyss."

It appeared to him, furthermore, that if such ideas of death as Marinya indulged in were the direct source of faith, if they were totally unknown, and suddenly revealed to the world by a noted philosopher, as an hypothesis, this hypothesis would have been acclaimed the fruit of genius, because it gave a definition, and answer to everything; it shed ample light not only upon life, but also upon death, which is darkness. Humanity would kneel before such a sage and such a scientific doctrine. On the other side, he felt distinctly that between them there was a link, and that link reminded him of Lida. Though the child herself was now fast returning to dust, yet "something" survived her, there remained certain waves of her thoughts, waves of feelings and emotions. Is not the fact that he became reconciled to Marinya, that they were betrothed, that they were now at her grave, that they would soon be united in wedlock, that they will bring to the world children, who will also live, love, and multiply—is all this not a wave of life that, coming from the child, may pass into the infinite? How then, can one believe that from a mortal being there should arise and go forth an immortal, infinite vitality and energy? Marinya found a reply to this in the simplicity of her faith, but Polanetzki did not. And yet Marinya was right. Lida was among them. A clouded, indistinct, shapeless idea flashed through Polanetzki's mind, that whatever a man meditates upon during his lifetime, whatever he yearns for and loves, must be a light matter—a hundred times lighter than ether, which finally gives birth to a certain abstract being, self-conscious perhaps, eternal, or remoulded into something perfect, absolute and infinitely inaccessible. It seemed to

him that the atoms of thoughts and feelings may group themselves into one particular unity, issuing from one brain or heart, have an affinity for each other, then cling to one another on that mysterious ground, on which originate physical elements in order to group into a physical unity. Naturally, this was not the time to ponder about it, but he could not get away from the conviction that he had discovered a small opening in that veil that heretofore covered his eyes. He could have been mistaken, but at that solemn moment when he felt the presence of Lida with them, he surmised that her presence could be imagined and understood in that sense only.

Soon the bells began to ring from the belfry in the centre of the cemetery. Some one was being carried to his last resting-place. Polanetzki offered Marinya his arm and together they went to the gates. Marinya, whose thought apparently still centered on Lida, said: "Now I am perfectly sure that we will be happy!"

She clung closely to Polanetzki. The wind was blowing so fiercely that she could scarcely walk without support. A gust of wind loosened her veil and wound it around her fiancé's neck. This awoke him from his reverie. He pressed her hand to his side, feeling that if love cannot make one free from death, it reconciles one to life. In the carriage he still held Marinya's hand in his own, and did not release it during the trip home. At times he regained his old time self-confidence at the encouraging thought that all the defects and fallacies to which he was heir, would be smoothed, wiped away, by this kind, generous, loving girl. "My wife, my wife!" it rang in his soul, and her sparkling eyes replied to that mute exclamation of joy: "Yes, yours, yours forever!"

Plavitski was not at home: he had not returned from his morning promenade. They were again left to themselves. Polanetzki sat down beside Marinya, and still under the influence of those feelings that filled his heart and brain on the way from the cemetery, he remarked: "You said that Lida is still with us—and you were right! Though I always returned from the cemetery dejected and dispirited, yet I do not regret our having made the trip to-day."

"We went there as if to receive our blessing from the one we both loved so dearly," replied she. "I carried away the same impression, and it seems to me that we are already united, or, at least, we are much closer to each other now than we were before."

"Yes, though the past will relapse into a sad but pleasant memory."

He took her hand.

"Then, if you believe that we shall be happy, why delay the blissful moment? I also hope, dearest, that fortune is smiling on us, and therefore let us not postpone the day of our wedding. If we are to begin a new life—let us do it soon."

"'Tis for you to decide. I am yours, heart and soul."

Once more he drew her to his heart, and his lips sought hers. She, influenced probably by the thought that she belonged to him more than ever to-day, did not shrink from his embrace, and, closing her eyes, abandoned herself to his will, as if she herself yearned for that first kiss.

CHAPTER VIII.

FOR Polanetzki began now a period of bustle, preparation, and worry. His house had been appropriately furnished a year ago, before he made the acquaintance of Marinya. At that time Bukatzki made this house a target for his wit, seeing in it a proof that Polanetzki was being consumed by a desire to marry, which the latter made no effort to deny.

"Yes," said he, "I have enough on which to allow myself that luxury; at the same time, I persuade myself that the beginning of preparations for that purpose forebodes the realization of the desire."

Bukatzki applauded this commendable foresight, and expressed his surprise that, being so prophetic, he did not at the same time hire a nurse and a maid for the future child. Frequently such discussions ended in a quarrel, for Polanetzki would not tolerate any insinuations about his lack of sober views of life. But Bukatzki argued that this was "bird-romance," ending in the building of a bird's nest. One claimed that there was nothing wrong in the idea of preparing a cage when one was about to come into the possession of a bird. The other replied that if the bird had not been caught the cage was only an illusion. It all ended, of course, in a scathing hint about the legs of Bukatzki, who could not make a run after any bird, especially of the wingless variety. In such cases Bukatzki became angered.

Now, however, with the cage ready, and the bird not only captured, but willing to enter it, Polanetzki had not much to do on that score. But he was surprised that the act of marriage, simple in its nature, had become in civilized countries so complicated. It seemed to him that if no one possessed the right to interfere with the moral phase of the union, the official or formal part of the

procedure should consist less of valueless ceremonies. He was of this opinion because, in the first place, he knew very little of the intricacies of law; he was hasty, hot-tempered, and bore with ill grace the drawing of legal papers and documents; and then, having decided to marry, he ceased to think and analyze himself, and went at it like a business man.

Although Polanetzki swore off analyzing, he persisted in doing it, performing this operation, if not on himself, then on Marinya. This he allowed himself, only because he was sure of success. He understood, however, that in the future of two beings the good will of one party is not sufficient, and is absolutely worthless if it is not met and joined by the good will of the other. He was certain that in marrying Marinya he did not wed a "dead heart." She had come to the world not solely with a pure, honest nature, but from early childhood had been face to face with toil and worry, under conditions which made her forget her own self and think of others. Besides, over her, like the last blessing of her dying mother, reigned that repose that made her beloved in and around Kremen. Polanetzki was conscious of it; he was convinced that, building his future on her heart and character, he built on a good and sound foundation. Often he recalled the words of one of his lady-friends, the friend of his mother, who, to the question, what interested her most, the future of her sons or daughters, replied: "The future of my sons alone fills me with anxiety, because my daughters, at the worst, can only be unfortunate." Yes, sons are educated by schools—and the world, which may make scoundrels out of them; whereas, the daughters are inoculated with toxine of honesty, and they, "at the worst, can only be unfortunate." Polanetzki understood that this was true of Marinya, and if he studied her at all, this study was more like the examination by a jeweler of his diamonds, but never like the method of the scientist, who hopes to obtain unknown deductions. And yet he once quarreled with Marinya, and the quarrel was quite serious, the cause being supplied by a letter from Vaskovski at Rome, which Polanetzki read to her.

The letter contained the following:

"My dear! I reside near Tritone, at the pension 'Française.' Please make an inspection of my Warsaw residence, and find out whether or not Pan Snoptchinski is taking good care of my urchins, and if the birds of Saint Francisco have food in plenty. The lads of the 'homo sapiens' kind must be fed well. I made ample provision for this. Less instruction and more love. Pan Snoptchinski is a good man, but he is melancholic. He explained it was due to the snow. When he is under the influence of this caprice, he spends days and weeks staring blankly at his boots. Children must be talked to, to inspire them with confidence. This is all about my Warsaw residence. My manuscript, of which I spoke to you, is being set up here in French, in the printing establishment of the daily paper, *L'Italie*. They poke fun at my French, but I am accustomed to this. Bukatzki arrived here lately. He is a good, nice lad! He has become an accomplished eccentric. He loves you and Marinya, and everybody else, I presume, but he delights in denying it. He frequently speaks such rubbish, that my ears begin to wither. God bless you, my good lad, and your precious Marinya! I would I could be present at your wedding, but I know not whether they will be ready with my book before Easter Sunday, and, therefore, until then, listen, my lad, to what I have to say. This is the object of my letter. Do not think that I am old and speak just to make myself heard. You know that I have been a teacher, and gave up that occupation when I fell heir to a little fortune left by my brother. I have seen a good deal in this world. If you ever have children, do not torture them with too much learning, but have them grow according to the will of God. I could have put a period here, but you have a weakness for figures, and I am going to give them to you. A child labors as much as an adult, as a government officer, for instance, with this difference that the officer is at liberty to converse with his fellow-workers during his work, to smoke cigarettes; while the child must strain all its nerves, its utmost attention, lest he should lose the thread and cease to understand what is said to him. The officer goes home for a rest. The child must prepare lessons for the following day, which means, for the more

capable boy, four hours, for the less capable six hours of tedious work. Add to this, that the poorer class of children often serve as teachers to their richer schoolmates, you will discover, it makes an average of twelve hours daily. Think of it—twelve hours of labor for a child! Do you grasp it? Now take into account the vast army of diseased, weak, and exhausted youths that grow up out of joint, physically and mentally, given to all possible and impossible manias? Do you understand how we populate our cemeteries with our children, and why the most monstrous ideas find followers? At the present time humane people limit the hours for factory employees, but the children are ignored by philanthropy. Here is a new field of useful activity and future glory! Do not torment your children with forced studying. I ask this of you and Marinya, and you must pledge your word to remember it. I do not cast my words to the wind, as is the frequent habit of Bukatzki, because I am prompted by a pure heart. That will be the greatest reform of future times—the greatest since the introduction of Christianity. In Prussia I met a peculiar accident, which I will describe to you some other time. I now embrace you both.” . . .

Marinya heard the entire contents of the letter, and, like Snotchinski described by Vaskovski, looked continually at the tips of her shoes. Polanetzki laughed aloud, and finally said:

“Have you ever heard anything like it? It’s some time yet before our wedding, and the professor is already anxious about the fate of our children.”

He paused, then added:

“And yet, the fault is mine, for I have written to him about so many things.”

He bent down to gaze into the drooping eyes of Marinya.

“What have you to say about this letter?” asked he.

When he put this question Polanetzki was at that moment in the unfortunate position of a man who cannot control himself, and acts in discord with his own nature. There was in his character, generally, rashness and roughness, but, withal, he was not strange to tenderness. But now, in the glance, as in the question addressed to the

young girl, who resembled a primrose, there was something savoring of the rough and discourteous. She, too, was aware that marriage involves the birth of children; but this appeared to her as something indelicate, which is not discussed in the presence of young girls, or, at least, veiled in hints of a very delicate form, or in a moment of great agitation, with hearts a-throbbing, under the influence of a solemn disposition, when the subject is treated like a sacred possibility of their common future. The negligent, careless tone of Polanetzki shocked her, and unwillingly she thought: "Why does he not understand that?" Acting contrary to her own nature, and, as it often happens with meek and timid people in moments of confusion, feigned to be angrier than she really was,

"You must not treat me thus," exclaimed she, indignantly. "You must not express yourself in that manner."

Polanetzki again burst into laughter, wishing to smooth his bad break with forced hilarity.

"Why are you angry?" asked he.

"You must not treat me thus."

"I do not understand. What's the trouble?"

"More's the pity if you do not understand."

He stopped laughing, his face became dark with rage, and he spoke rapidly, like a man who suddenly loses control of his words.

"It may be that I am foolish, but I know what is good, and what is not. In this manner our life becomes unendurable. Whoever is prone to make an elephant out of a fly, must blame himself for the outcome, and as I see that my presence annoys you, I will leave you immediately." And, grasping his hat, he made a stiff bow, and ran out.

Marinya did not stop him. Anger, disappointment for the time being, benumbed all other senses, leaving an impression as though somebody had struck her over the head. Her thoughts, scattered like a flock of birds, retained only one idea: "went away; will not return." Thus on her head collapsed the structure which they began to build and embellish, and there remained nothing, a void, which was painful, tormenting, aimless, like the very life to come. However, it was all so sudden, so unexpected and incomprehensible, that she could not

give herself an exact account of it, and approaching her writing-desk she began mechanically to arrange the different articles thereon with such briskness that it seemed as if her whole life depended on it. Then she cast her glance at Lida's portrait, suddenly sat down and pressed her temples with her hands. After a while she regained her composure, and the thought that Lida's will was stronger than theirs brought a ray of hope to her aching heart. She rose and paced the room, trying to remember what had happened, how Polanetzki looked and acted, not only at the last moment, but one, two, three days before. Compassion, regret, overcame the smarting of the insult, and joined forces with the feeling of affection she cherished for Polanetzki. After some meditation she concluded that she had no right to chide him, that she was compelled to accept and love Polanetzki such as he was, and not to demand that he act in harmony with her ideas. "He is not a doll, but a living human being," she repeated several times. She was seized with a consciousness of her own guilt and remorse. Her naturally meek heart struggled with her common-sense, which told her that Polanetzki was wrong, that she said nothing he could not easily forget and forgive.

"If his is a kind and sympathetic heart, he will soon return," thought she, at the same time fearing the demands of masculine vanity in general, and Polanetzki's particularly. She was too intelligent not to have noticed that he was very sensitive and took great care to preserve his reputation for being stoical and firm. Half an hour passed, and found her deeply convinced that she alone was to blame. "I have tantalized him so much," thought she, "that I must submit now, and I will be the first to hold out the hand of reconciliation." This was paramount to the writing of a note. He suffered enough from his blunder in regard to Kremen, and ought to be pitied. She was ready to burst into tears over his alleged woes. Nothing seemed easier to her than to write a few warm words, which, coming straight from her heart, would touch his own. She was mistaken. Letters have no eyes to fill with tears, no face to smile both sadly and enchantingly, no voice to tremble and quiver, no hands to hold

out the palm of peace. A letter may be written and understood variously, for it consists of black characters on cold, death-like, indifferent paper.

Marinya tore up into fragments the third sheet of note paper, when the face of Plavitski, with his blackened moustaches, appeared on the threshold.

"Is Polanetzki here?" inquired he.

"No, papa."

"And will he come again?"

"I know it not," replied she, heaving a deep sigh.

"If he comes, please tell him that I will return in an hour. I must speak to him."

"Oh, and so must I," thought Marinya, and throwing away the fragments of the third sheet, she took a fourth one, and grew pensive.

Should she treat the quarrel as an innocent, harmless joke, or simply make an apology. The joke might not receive a cold reception, but an apology, however sincere, is so difficult, so very painful to make! Had he but remained, one word, the mere offering of her hand, were sufficient, but he flew out, like a shot, that dear madman!

And she raised her head and began to ponder and plan the contents of her letter, when suddenly the bell in the corridor rang violently. Marinya's heart, as if in response, beat fast, while the question flashed through her brain: "Is it he?" The door opened—it was he.

He entered like a wolf, with lowered head and gloomy face. Apparently he was not certain of the reception, but Marinya jumped up from her seat and with a throbbing heart and beaming face, happy that he had returned, ran to meet him, and put her hands on his shoulders.

"Ah, what a kind, good man you are!" exclaimed she. "You don't know that I was about to write to you."

Polanetzki kissed her hands in silence, and finally said,

"You ought to throw me down the stairs," and carried away by the feeling of gratitude, he drew her to his breast and showered kisses upon her lips, eyes, temples and hair. In such moments he rewarded himself for everything that was lost, and what to him meant the charm of love.

"You are very kind," continued he, releasing her. "I came to apologize—nothing more. I cooled off, and gave

myself a vigorous scolding. . . . I walked the streets and hoped to see you at the window, to learn, if possible, by your face, whether or not I could return . . . but I could not wait, and I came."

"'Tis I who ought to beg your pardon, because the fault is mine. You see the torn bits of paper. All this I have written." Now his eyes were devouring her face, her hair, which she arranged again, and the more he gazed at her, the more she appeared to him with her glowing face and laughing eyes, the one girl he dreamed of in the days of yore. Marinya felt his steady gaze, and grew confused, and this embarrassment struggled with a purely maidenly coquetry. She purposely combed her hair carelessly, unskilfully, so that it fell in long wavy tresses upon her shoulders. At the same time she said: "Stop looking at me thus or I'll leave you."

"But you are my treasure, my wealth. I have seen nothing better, nothing prettier, in my whole life."

And again he extended his hands towards her, but she dodged, and escaped.

"You must not! You must not!" said she. "I am burning with shame, and I must go away."

At last, she rearranged her hair. They sat down side by side and began to chat calmly.

"And did you really intend to write to me?" queried Polanetzki.

"Don't you see the torn paper? "

Marinya looked up toward the book-shelf above her desk and said musingly, "because I was to blame myself."

And thinking that she could not be too generous, she added, blushing and dropping her eyes:

"And yet Vaskovski is right, speaking of—science."

Polanetzki was seized with the desire to kneel down and kiss her little feet. Her beauty and generosity not only disarmed him, but enchanted.

"I am lost, lost forever!" exclaimed he, as if finishing aloud a certain thought—"you have absolutely conquered me, and I am enslaved."

She gaily shook her head.

"Oh, I don't know, I am so timid, such a coward!"

"You—a coward! If this is the case I will relate to you a story. In Belgium I made the acquaintance of two young ladies—sisters, who owned a tom-cat. He was so quiet and tame, that it seemed one could dissect him, without making him lose his temper. One day one of the sisters was presented with a tame rabbit, and what do you think? the cat was so afraid of the new-comer, that he hid under the bureau, or behind the range. One day the young ladies went out for a walk and remembered that the cat was left alone with the rabbit:

"I am afraid 'Matoo' will attack the rabbit," said one.

"'Matoo' is afraid of him; he shuns his presence," replied the other, and the promenade was uninterrupted. In an hour the young ladies returned home, and can you guess what they found there? Only the ears of the rabbit. Similar are the relations of women toward us men. You feign to be afraid of us, and then all there is left of us—are the ears."

Polanetzki laughed; so did Marinya.

"I am positive that the fate of the rabbit will also be mine," added Polanetzki.

But there was no truth in his assertion; he felt that it would be otherwise. Marinya was amused for a moment or two, then said:

"No; I have not such a character."

"So much the better. I will tell you candidly what influence I draw from my observation of life and humanity: the greater egoism always has the advantage over the lesser."

"Or the greater love yields to the lesser."

"The result is the same. As to myself, I must confess that had I been married to an insipid wife she would have been in my hands—so. (Polanetzki spread his palm, then clenched it into a fist). But with such a profound creature, like you—it's a different matter altogether. It appears to me that the burden of the struggle will be to make you think and care a little more for yourself, to persuade you not to relinquish too much. Such is your nature. At least, such is the universal opinion of you, and even Mashko, who is far from boasting the wisdom of Solomon, said to me: 'She may be unhappy with

you—you with her—never!’ And he was right. It’s curious to know what sort of a husband Mashko will make for his wife. His is a firm, iron hand.”

“Does he love her?”

“Not as ardently as before, when he was encouraged by flirtation.”

“Because he was not so mean, like a certain gentleman well-known to you, Pan Stach.”

“They will make a peculiar couple. She is not at all homely, although somewhat pale, and her eyes are always red. But Mashko has the consolation of marrying a dowry. He admitted that Kraslovska had no love for him, and when the scandal with Goutovski occurred (such a gallant knight he is!) he felt sure that the ladies would take advantage of the opportunity and sever all friendly relations with him. In the meantime, it turned out the opposite, and, think ye, Mashko is again in distress, because everything is going on so smoothly. He considers it suspicious. And, indeed, some peculiar things happen among this interesting little group. Gossip has it, that there exists even a Pan Kraslovska, and God knows what not! All this, taken together, appears to be a very stupid affair. Happiness will not crown their union, at least such happiness as I fancy.”

“And what of the happiness of your imagination?”

“I think that happiness consists in the possibility of marrying a positive woman, like you, and see the future clearly before you.”

And I think that to be happy means to be beloved, but this is not sufficient.”

“What else is required?”

“It means to be worthy of the love, to—” And Marinya grew silent, finding no more words for her answer, but she ultimately added:

“To have faith in your husband, and together with him work for your welfare.”

CHAPTER IX.

POLANETZKI was not mistaken. All went well with Mashko, and Panni Kraslovska conducted herself so nicely that his alarm grew in dimension. At times he ridiculed this dread himself, and as he had become quite intimate and outspoken with Polanetzki for some time past, he once remarked :

"They are perfect angels; with all that, my hair often stands on end, because there must be something in it."

"Better give thanks to God!"

"They are too idealistic, virtuous, and not empty. For instance, yesterday I dropped a hint that I plied my profession only because that, from my point of view, the sons of our noblest families must nowadays call some occupation their own. And guess what was their reply? They told me that the law was as good an occupation as anything else, that to them labor was noble if it was honest, that only barren natures shrink from work. And fired so many volleys by way of hints, that I wanted to answer with some sentence from a caligraphic motto: 'honesty, as a rock out of the abyss, etc.,' or something similar. In a word, I tell you, there is something in this. I thought it really bordered on the father, but the poor man seems to have nothing to do with it after all. I have been duly informed by my anonymous friend that the 'father' is at present living in Bordeaux, France, under the name of Mr. de Langlais. He has a brood of his own, not so much legal, as numerous, which he supports on a pension supplied by generous Panni Kraslovska."

"And what is this to you?"

"Nothing at all."

"If it's true, it only proves that there are wretched women—that's all."

"Yes, but is their income as big as their wretchedness?"

Remember, that I am under many obligations myself. And, besides, if they are really such women, and rich to boot, I am in danger of really falling in love, which is absurd. If, however, they possess naught, or next to it, I will also fall in love, which is still more absurd. I like her."

"No, that will be the only sensible thing. But think of yourself, Mashko, and also of me, and the Plavitskis; you know, that in affairs of finance, I am anything but merciful."

"I have some credit yet. Besides, you have a safe mortgage on Kremen. In two or three days, the Kraslovskas will give an engagement party, after which I hope to get all the information necessary. However," continued he, "I do not comprehend how a positive man, like myself, got into their graces. . . There is not a person worth believing in the whole of Warsaw who doubts the truth of their reputed wealth. But they are so noble! . . ."

"Your fears are baseless," impatiently interrupted Polanetzki. "But you, my dear, are not a positive man, by any means, because you always pretended, and you are feigning even now, instead of attending to a business that might give you bread."

The betrothal of Mashko and Panna Kraslovska took place a few days later. Among the guests invited was Marinya. Panni Kraslovska highly esteemed Plavitski and his family connections, although she snubbed Bigel. Mashko, not to be outdone, invited all his friends bearing loud titles, men with monocles on their eye, and their hair parted in the middle, mostly youths, not extremely witty nor brilliant. Among them were the brothers Vishoff, who were named Mizya, Kizya, Bizya, Brelotchek and Tatka, respectively. They were also nicknamed the five slumbering brothers, because their whole life was confined to their legs; they were only awake when the Carnival began, and became petrified again, at least in regard to mental activity, for the whole of Lent. Bukatzki loved them, in his manner, and poked fun at them at every available opportunity. There was also a Baron Cat, who having heard from some one about an ancient Cat from Dembu, always added, when being introduced to strangers: "From Dembu." To everything else, no matter what

the topic was, he invariably replied: "Quelle drôle d'histoire!" Mashko was in close intimacy with the most of them, addressed them "thou," though there was just a hint of negligence, bordering on contempt, in his relations to Kopovski, a young man with an exquisite idealistic head, and beautiful, though senseless, eyes. The list of Mashko's clever friends comprised Polanetzki and Kresovski. Kraslovska was honored by the presence of several elderly ladies, with their daughters, whom the brothers Vishoff made feeble attempts to entertain. A few bald heads completed the audience that witnessed that interesting act. The bride, all in white, looked very charming, notwithstanding her somewhat red and inflamed eyes. There was a certain feminine beauty in her, enhanced by her peculiar, almost slumber-like, repose. She reminded one of a statue of Perugini. At times she grew animated, like an alabaster oil-lamp, at the sudden flickering of the flame, then became dim again, not without a certain charm. Thanks to her white dress, she looked better than ever that night. Gazing at her, Polanetzki mused that hers might be a dry heart and an empty head, but she could be a good wife, especially for Mashko, who put good form above all other virtues. Their life promised to be a cold and gray day, when the sun does not scorch, when no storm threatens. They were now sitting side by side, not too far from, yet not too near, the rest of the company, and entertained each other no more and no less than was proper. If his conduct lacked the warmth of genuine feeling, it more than betrayed the ardent desire to be "correct." She paid him in the same coin. They frequently smiled at each other, but he spoke more in the tone of the future head of the family; in short, they presented as ideal a couple as could be imagined, in the worldly sense of the word.

"I could not endure that," thought Polanetzki, and suddenly he recalled to mind, while she was sitting there, smiling, white, and calm, that physician, who could "not tear his heart away from her," who was resting in his grave, forgotten, as if he never existed. And Polanetzki not only despised Panna Kraslovska, but her calmness seemed to him a spiritual stagnation, that had once been

stylish ; a repose that poets condemned, seeing in it something demoniacal ; but now it became a mere typification of mental shallowness and emptiness. "She is only a goose—a goose without a heart, at that."

Now he understood Mashko's alarm concerning their noble conduct toward himself, and, strangely enough, Mashko gained considerably in his estimation, as a man of keen perception and forethought. Then he compared his own bride with Panna Kraslovska, and with growing self-gratification said to himself : "My Marinya is a bird of another feather," and he felt a soothing relief, at the sight of her. The former resembled an artificial plant, under a glass cover, a plant that never inhaled the pure air. The other breathed life and warmth. And, furthermore, the comparison on the lines of social etiquette was more in favor of Marinya, than otherwise. Letting his eyes wander from one to the other, he finally gained the conviction that the perfection, the refinement, of Panna Kraslovska was affected, unnatural, while with Marinya, it was inborn. In the first it went no further than the inner folds of her dress, in the latter it was imbedded within the depths of her soul, as a natural emblem of nobility. From the standpoint of Bukatzki he saw as much as he could remember of the former's characteristic observations ; remembering his saying, that women, notwithstanding their origin, divide into two distinct classes : cultured patricians with spiritual principles and demands, absorbed in the flesh and blood ; or parvenues who put all these qualities on like cloaks—for the cynosure and enlightenment of guests only. Eyeing the noble profile of Marinya, Polanetzki thought with the pride of a peasant marrying a patrician lady, a princess in the fullest sense of the word, beautiful and bewitching. Women often need but a little field, but a small share of happiness, to bloom and expand. When Marinya returned from Lida's obsequies, she seemed to Polanetzki almost homely and repulsive, now she dazzled him with her beauty ; while Kraslovska in her presence looked like a faded flower ; and if the fortune of Marinya depended solely upon her beauty, she would have been acclaimed beautiful, indeed.

With their indispensable glasses on their noses, the five

brothers Vishoff devoured Marinya with their eyes, and the Baron Cat of Dembu declared that, were she free—well, he might, perhaps, attempt to court her.

The same evening Polanetzki discovered a new feature of his character, whose existence he had not heretofore suspected: he was jealous. It was well that he was confident of the purity of Marinya, and that his jealousy had no fertile soil to grow on. In former days he was jealous of Mashko, but then it was natural. But now he could not somehow make clear to himself the curious fact why a Kopovski, with the head of an archangel and the brain of a bird, should give him cause for irritation, simply because he was sitting beside Marinya, and pelting her with more or less ridiculous questions, to which she replied for mere courtesy's sake. He rebuked himself quite severely. "You cannot expect her to show him her tongue." However, he noticed later on, that she addressed Kopovski quite frequently, that her replies were accompanied by winning smiles. At supper he sat beside her, but was very angry and silent. When she inquired the cause of his gloom and silence, he made worse a decidedly bad effect, by replying:

"I do not want to mar the impression produced upon you by Kopovski."

It pleased her that he was jealous, and, puckering the corners of her mouth, to prevent an explosion of laughter, she looked at him intently and said:

"Do you, also, find anything extraordinary in this Kopovski?"

"Indeed! Indeed! When he promenades the main thoroughfares of the city, it seems to every one that he carries his head with him to give it an airing, lest it should be destroyed by moths."

The corners of her mouth stood the test splendidly, but her eyes were laughing, and at last she could endure it no longer, and said softly: "You're a miserably jealous man."

"I? Not a whit."

"Then I will relate to you extracts from our conversation. You know that last night, in the pavilion, during the concert, there was a sad accident—a case of catalepsy. The subject was discussed this evening in our presence,

and I asked Kopovski whether he ever saw a victim of that disease, and do you know what was his reply? That 'every one is apt to carry different convictions upon the matter.' Well, is he not an extraordinary man?"

Polanetzki relented, and laughed.

"I will make a short story of it. The poor devil does not understand what is said to him, and his replies are made at random, just what he happens to think at a given moment."

The rest of the evening they spent together very peacefully. At the moment of leave-taking, when the Plavitskis took their places in a two-seated carriage, and could not make room for Polanetzki, Marinya, leaning over, whispered: "Will you come to-morrow for dinner?"

"I will, because I am in love," replied he, throwing her fur coat around her.

And she whispered in reply, as if it were great news to him: "And so am I."

He was sincere, indeed, but her words had the genuine ring in it.

Mashko escorted Polanetzki to the latter's home. They spoke of the evening, just spent. Mashko declared that he had made an effort to talk business with Panni Kraslovska, but did not succeed.

"There was a moment," said he, "when I was about to put to her a direct question, clothed, of course, in a delicate form, but I shrank from it. What grounds have I to doubt the existence or the size of my bride's dowry? Only because these ladies treated me more cordially than I had expected? This is all very well, yet I am afraid to plunge too deep. Suppose my fears are, indeed, unfounded, suppose they really possess a large fortune—they would become indignant, exasperated, my curiosity would be considered impudent. This must be taken into consideration lest my ship should meet its doom at the very entrance to the harbor."

"Let us admit that it's all true," replied Polanetzki, "that they have, indeed, a goodly fortune; but if it should be proven a mere soap-bubble, what will you do then? Have you thought of any plan? Will you refuse to marry Kraslovska?"

"Under all and any circumstances, marry I will, because I have nothing to lose by this transaction. Married or single, my fate is sealed. But, having married her, I could frankly reveal to my creditors the real state of affairs, but . . . suppose she then repudiates me?"

"Suppose she does not? What then?"

"Then I will certainly fall in love with her, and will begin negotiations with my creditors. I will cease, as you call it, to pretend, and will endeavor to earn an honest living for both of us. You know that I am not a bad hand at law."

"It's a good calling, all right, and all's well; but this does not console me, nor the Plavitskis."

"You are much better situated than the rest, having Kremen as security. At the worst you will take the management of the estate into your own hands, and make the best of it. They are in a sore plight who took my word for it, and I will frankly admit that I am sorry for them. I trusted and trust. This is my weak spot . . . But, given ample time, I will come out of this muddle in good form."

They now reached Polanetzki's apartments, and Mashko did not succeed in finishing his sentence. But at the very moment of departing he suddenly said: "Listen, Polanetzki, I know you consider me a scoundrel, but I am not as guilty as you may think. True, I pretend, I feign, as you like to express it, but I had to dodge, and clinch, and sprint, and in this fashion got off the straight path. But I am worn out, and will candidly admit that there has come upon me a great desire to taste a little of that happiness which I have never known before. I wanted to marry your present bride, though she is by no means rich. As to Kraslovska, there are moments when I fain would prefer to see her penniless, but not to see her loyal and true at the discovery that mine is a ruined fortune. I say this sincerely,—and now, good-night!"

"This is something new in Mashko," mused Polanetzki, entering the gates of his house. Approaching his door he was amazed to hear issuing from his parlor sounds of music. Some one playing on the piano. The valet explained that Bigel had been awaiting his return for the

last two hours. Polanetzki became alarmed, but at the same moment he thought that were he the bearer of some bad news, he would not think of music. Bigel, it transpired, wanted Polanetzki's signature to some document which was to be mailed the following morning.

"But you could have left the papers here and gone to bed," remonstrated Polanetzki.

"I took quite a nap here on the sofa, then awoke and sat down at the piano. I played tolerably well in olden times, but now my fingers are growing heavy. . . . Your Marinya, I think, is a player. It's such a pleasure to have music in your home."

Polanetzki laughed his sincere, hearty laugh.

"My Marinya possesses the talent of the Scriptures: 'The left hand knows not what the right doeth.' Poor child! She makes no pretension to being an artist, and only plays when yielding to incessant demands."

"You seem to belittle it, to ridicule it; but such is the way of lovers."

"Yes. I am in love. At least it appears to me so now, although this conviction is growing stronger of late. Will you have some tea?"

"Yes. Do you come from the Kraslovskas?"

"Yes. I have spent the evening there."

"Well, how is Mashko? Is he anyway near a safe haven?"

"A moment ago we parted. He brought me home. By the way, he often gives utterance to such things one would scarcely expect from him."

And Polanetzki, glad to have some one to whom he could relate his impressions, began his narrative, describing the attitude of Mashko, and his own surprise when he discovered in the matter-of-fact, practical lawyer, a romantic individual.

"Mashko is not necessarily a scoundrel," said Bigel, "he is only on a crooked line, on the wrong road, which is caused by his strife and struggle for perfunctory honors. On the other hand, this doubtful honor saves him from a final collapse. As to the sentimentalism you discovered in the man——"

Bigel cut off the end of his cigar, lighted it most care-

fully, and, assuming a more comfortable position, continued:

"Bukatzki would deliver himself on the same theme of a dozen or two sardonic paradoxes, touching society. I never forgot his assertion that here something must always be admired and loved by some one. He thinks it stupid, but I deem it very important. Living in this world, we all must be something—and what, pray, are we, and what have we? No money, brain—just enough to enable one to establish himself firmly in his respective place in society. In fact, what we still possess is the love for somebody, or, at least, the natural demand for it. You know that I am a sober, sensible man, a merchant to boot, and therefore my logic is sound. I frequently think of Bukatzki. . . . A Mashko, for instance, in many another place, would be branded a rascal. I know a number of such men,—and here, being a scoundrel, he may pass for an honest man, and it's all right—just the thing! As long as there smoulders within him the last spark of respectability and decency, he cannot become a brute. And this spark will always glow, because a man here must love something, sooner or later, and redeem himself."

"You remind me of Vaskovski, and what you say resembles his views of the Aryans."

"What's Vaskovski to me! I say what I think. I know of one great truth: deprive us of that yearning to love, and we will fall to pieces like a barrel without hoops."

"Apropos of that, let me tell you of my conclusion, made many moons ago. Whether you love someone or not—that is another question, but of one thing I am fully aware—you must love somebody. I thought of this a good deal. After the death of Lida, I often felt, and I do so now, a smarting, painful, yearning. There are minutes—how shall I explain it,—moments of worry, of distrust, of sinister doubts, which forebode no good; and if in spite of all I take this step, if I enlist in the ranks of married men, it is only with the object of giving a vital impetus to the love of mankind toward its fellow-beings; to support, so to say, its crumbling structure."

"It may be so, and yet it may not," replied the merciless

Bigel, "your marriage is dictated by pure impulses of the intellect; you are marrying because your wife to be is a pretty, honest lass, who captivates you. Do not deceive yourself in the belief that this is not so, for then you will begin to simulate. All men in your position are a prey to such doubts. I, myself, as you are aware, am not a philosopher, and yet, ten times a day, on the eve of my wedding, I tortured myself with the question: 'Do I love my bride sufficiently, do I love her as I ought to, is not my love inspired more by calculation than by the impulse of the heart?' Of course I married sensibly. My wife is a good woman, and our life is a tolerably happy one. So will yours be; you must take things as they come. This constant prying into the mysteries of your heart—is absurd."

"Perhaps it is. I have no desire to lie on my back, face upward, all day long, and analyze myself, but I can not shut my eyes to facts."

"Which facts?"

"That my feelings underwent a radical change; they're no longer what they have been. I think they will ultimately regain their old form and intensity. I confess that everything points that way just now. I marry, regardless of all remarks pro and con, as if they were never made, but I keep on uttering them, nevertheless."

"They won't hurt you."

"Besides, I want the windows of my house to face the sunny side of the street, or else my rooms will be cold."

"Very well said," replied Bigel.

CHAPTER X.

SPRING was ushered in once more. Lent was at an end, and with the last days came the two great events of the year: the weddings of both Mashko and Polanetzki. Bukatski, who was invited to be groomsman, sent in reply the following lines:

"Mine would be, indeed, a heinous crime were I to discourage, to banish, the creative power from the general situation; that is, the state of complete, absolute peace and tranquillity, and, by means of marriages, introduce into it an element of noisy, vociferous beings that demand cradles, and amuse themselves with their tiny feet, holding them in dangerous proximity to their mouths. I will come, nevertheless, because your stoves and ovens are much warmer than ours."

He arrived a week before Easter Sunday, and brought for Polanetzki an elegant present, in the form of a parchment, bearing the inscription: "Stanislav Polanetzki, after a long and grievous celibacy, etc."

Polanetzki was much pleased with this eccentric gift, and the next day took it with him to Marinya. But he forgot the day was Sunday, and was sadly disappointed, finding her prepared to leave.

"You are going away?" asked he.

"Yes—to church. To-day is Sunday."

"Oh, Sunday! Yes, true. I planned to spend the forenoon with you here."

She glanced at him with her clear blue eyes, and said, simply:

"And the church services?"

At first Polanetzki received those few words as he did all others, paying no particular attention to their subtlety, free from the suspicion that in the future their sentiment

is destined to play an all too prominent part. Mechanically, he answered:

"You say—the service? Well, I am quite free myself, now. We will go together."

Marinya received his proposal with apparent pleasure, and when on the way to church, said:

"The happier I am, the more intense is my love for God!"

"This is an evidence of a good character, because a good many think of God as of a horrible calamity—a plague, as it were."

In church he was once more struck by the same thought that came to him during his first journey to Kremen, when he accompanied the old man to church in Vontori. It was: all philosophers and all their pet systems perish and pass away into the unknown Infinite. Man, alone, was and always will be the same. But it appeared to him incomprehensible. Since the death of Lida he returned time and again to these riddles, whether he happened to be in the cemetery, in church attending mass, or under other circumstances, when in a man there takes place something which has no actual connection with the real demands of life, but with things mortal, "beyond the grave." It struck him that for that unknown existence "beyond the grave," a great deal was being done; that a man, in spite of all his philosophy and doubts, lives in a manner to confirm his belief in another world. Polanetzki, furthermore, meditated upon the startling struggles and collapse of large and small egoisms, the numerous acts of charity, the philanthropic institutions, such as asylums, hospitals, churches—all built with the hope of a fair return for investments made in the "great beyond."

This thought found lodgment in his brain, and he understood that before attempting to affect a reconciliation with life, one must treat death in similar manner, which is a fruitless task without profound, sincere faith in that "great beyond."

Naturally, when a man is well and thriving, the question solves itself easily enough. It is: "To the devil with rags; sable is much better."

And if this is true, what more can one desire? Man

sees before him in the future a new existence, at the worst, bristling with curious events, and this confidence in its existence is paramount to peace of soul.

In Marinya, Polanetzki found a splendid illustration. Being somewhat nearsighted, she bent over her prayer-book, and when from time to time she raised her head, her face was full of repose, and seemed angelic in its peacefulness.

"Happy, fortunate woman," mused he. "And she always will be happy."

On their return home Polanetzki, still under the influence of the same thought, said to Marinya:

"In the church you resembled the face in the painting of Angelo; you looked the picture of happiness."

"I am, indeed, very happy. And do you know why? Because I am now a much better woman than I have been. Before, I nursed a vengeance, a wrong. I saw no ray of hope before me, and everything seemed to melt and merge into a sea of grief and bitterness. It is claimed that misery ennoble only chosen hearts, but I am not one of those fortunate few. Grief and misery may, in truth, purify and ennoble, but misery and grief certainly do spoil, ruin, and poison our life."

"Was your hatred for me very intense?"

Marinya gazed at him lovingly.

"So intense, that day and night I only thought of you, and you alone."

Mashko was right. Somehow he made use of the expression: "She prefers to hate you rather than to love me."

"True! True!"

Thus conversing they reached her home. Polanetzki showed her his parchment, but she did not relish Bukatzki's joke. Marriage to her was sacred, both from the standpoint of sentiment and religion.

"Such things are not to be treated as a joke," she said to Polanetzki, "it is an insult to me and my views on the subject."

Bukatzki himself came after dinner. Several months of life in Italy left no marks of improvement upon the frail body. If anything, he had grown thinner. The wine, "Chianti" did not cure his catarrh of the stomach. His

nose reminded one of the sharp point of a knife and the ironically smiling face resembled a bit of china. Being considered a relative of Plavitski, he spoke without constraint, and hardly crossing the threshold he announced, that, thanks to the present depravation of the human mind, he can only regret, but not wonder, at their betrothal; that he came with the hope of saving them, but arrived too late, and it behoves him now to be prudent. Marinya was inclined to take offence at this rather bold remark, but Polanetzki, who loved Bukatzki, gave another interpretation to the latter's words, saying in conclusion to the eccentric: "Save your jokes for the wedding, when you will offer your toast, and now tell us how our professor is getting along?"

"His mind is gone," gravely responded Bukatzki.

"Pray do not joke—it's brutal," said Marinya.

But Bukatzki heeded her not and continued: "I have sufficient evidence that Professor Vaskovski is demented. First, he promenades the streets of Rome hatless, or rather he did so before he left Rome for Perugia; second, he attacked a young and beautiful English lady whom he tried to convince that the Britons are Christians only in their private life, that the treatment of Ireland by England is not at all Christian. Third, he is publishing a pamphlet in which he declares that the mission of the rehabilitation of Christianity and its glorious history is entrusted to the youngest of the Aryans. Does it not all prove his insanity?"

"We knew this before his departure, and if he is threatened with nothing worse, we may still hope to see him in excellent health."

"He does not think of returning?"

Polanetzki took out of his pocket a notebook, and writing on it a few words with a pencil gave it to Marinya.

"Read it and tell me your opinion," said he.

"If you use such tactics in my presence,—I retire," remarked Bukatzki.

"No, no, it's not a secret."

Marinya flushed crimson, like a red ripe cherry, and in her exultation, not believing her own eyes, she asked:

"And this is true?"

"It depends on you."

"Ah, Stach! I never even dreamed of this. I will run at once and tell papa."

And she ran out of the room.

"If I were a poet I would hang myself at once," said Bukatzki.

"Why?"

"Because if a few words written by the hand of the senior partner of the firm of Polanetzki, Bigel & Co. can make a better, stronger impression than the choicest of sonnets, it is far better to be a miller than a poet."

The delighted Marinya had forgotten the notebook, and Polanetzki showed it to Bukatzki.

"Read," said he.

"After the wedding—Venice, Florence, Rome, Naples. Good idea?" read Bukatzki. "Ah—this means a trip to Italy."

"Yes. Think ye, the poor girl had never been abroad, and Italy to her was an enchanted land, of which she only dared to dream. It's a great joy to her—and I want to grant her that pleasure."

"Love and Italy! O God! how often have I seen this combination! But it's all so old, so threadbare."

"It's not true! try to fall in love, and you will see what a world of new sensations you will discover!"

"The trouble with me, my dear, is not that I had never been in love before, but that I am no longer capable of loving. I have long since unearthed that spirit, and he presents no more riddles for me."

"Get married, Bukatzki!"

"I cannot: I have weak eyes and a weak stomach."

"This ought not to be an obstacle. What else?"

"You see, my dearest, woman is a blank piece of paper on which one can and does write on either side. Your eyes swim, the words confuse, and the whole becomes a sort of hash which I can neither read nor digest."

"But you cannot live forever on witticisms."

"And yet I will die, just as surely as you who are going to be married. It seems to us that we think of death, but she thinks a good deal more of us."

In the meantime Marinya returned with her father, who

embraced Polanetzki and said: "Marinya told me that it is your intention to go to Italy after your wedding?"

"If my future empress will give her consent."

"She will not only consent," replied Marinya, "but she is at this very moment losing her head from sheer joy, and is ready to jump and dance like a ten-year-old child."

"If the blessings of a lonely old man will be of any benefit to you in your travels," said Plavitski, "I cheerfully invoke the blessing of God upon your heads."

He lifted his eyes heavenward, and raised his hand to pronounce the blessing, but Marinya stopped him, and kissing his hand, said joyfully:

"You will have ample time to bless us, papa dear—this is going to take place after the wedding."

"Properly speaking," interfered Bukatzki—"I see no ground for the blessing—it's so easy nowadays to travel; you buy your railroad tickets, you check your trunks, take your places in the parlor car, and off you are."

"Have you really come to that condition, when you think a father's blessing unnecessary," complained Plavitski, addressing the young cynic.

Instead of an answer, however, the latter embraced Plavitski, and kissed the lapels of his waistcoat.

"And shall we not play a game of cards, 'old father,'" said he, "and give the young lovers a chance to be alone with each other?"

"But on one condition—the game must be played with a rubicon.*"

"With anything you like."

And Bukatzki having pacified the old man, turned to the young people.

"Take me along as your chaperon through Italy."

"I shall never entertain such an idea. Why should I? Though I have traveled extensively through France, have lived in Belgium, I know but little of the charms of Italy. I am going there to see sights, to look at things interesting and enlightening, and not at you. I have seen such as you, and know that you do not love as much art, as you suppose you do. Yes, they really come down to that," he added, turning to Marinya. "They lose every feeling for

* Game called piquet—"rubicon," presumably a term.

that great and, at the same time, simple art, and seek for something that could still amuse their satiated nature, something that would furnish them with an opportunity to show off. They see not the tree, but look for stumps. They are not enthusiastic at the sight of things colossal, upon which we would gaze open-mouthed. They need some small object, of whose existence no one ever heard. They are constantly occupied with finding names for such 'discoveries,' with persuading others to believe with them that the worst and weakest productions are much more curious and interesting than the best and most perfect of their kind. Were we to accept his proposition, we should never gaze on the immense cathedrals, but upon miniatures, which must be examined through a huge telescope. All this is satiety, abuse. . . We are common, every-day people, we will look at things of interest to us."

Marinya looked at her lord to be, with ill-concealed pride, as if she wished to say: "This I call eloquence, sense!"

And her pride was crescendo, when Bukatzki simply and laconically acquiesced:

"You are right!"

But indignation took the place of pride when Bukatzki added: "And had you not defended yourself before this charming judge, I could not have won my case, under any circumstance."

"Pardon me, but I am not blind," pleaded Marinya, "nor am I a connoisseur of art."

"On the contrary, I have no doubt that you are. If I am permitted to be one. I will declare, a little boldly, perhaps, that my knowledge has a wide range, and it does not prevent me from loving the great in art, I assure you. You may believe me, not Polanetzki."

"Oh, no, I'll rather take my chances on him."

"I foresaw this," replied Bukatzki.

Marinya began to eye now one, then the other, with an air of perplexity. Meanwhile Plavitski returned with the cards. The betrothed paced the room, hand-in-hand, soon lost in each other. Bukatzki felt bored, and this feeling grew stronger every minute. Toward the end of the evening his gaiety vanished entirely, and his small

face became still smaller, his nose grew sharper, and he looked withal like a faded, withered leaf. The friends left Plavitski's house together. Polanetzki could not help noticing his friend's gloominess, and inquired:

"What ails you? Why do you walk like a wet rooster?"

"Because I am—a machine"—replied Bukatzki. "As long as there is plenty of fuel stored away within me, I ride ahead, but as soon as the stock is exhausted, my speed is checked—I halt."

"What do you use for fuel?" asked Polanetzki, gazing at him attentively.

"I have various sorts of coal. Come along with me. I will treat you to a cup of coffee, and this will enliven us."

"Listen, though it is a delicate matter, yet some one told me, that you are addicted to the morphine habit. How long have you used it?"

"Not very long. No! If you knew what a wonderful vista opens after a dose!"

"Have fear of God, man! This will kill you!"

"It does. But tell me, pray, sincerely, candidly, did it ever strike you that one may be afflicted with a nostalgia for death?"

"No, I understand things differently."

For a moment both were silent.

"Come, come!" urged Bukatzki, "I shall not treat you to morphine. I have coffee and a bottle of excellent Bordeaux. We shall have an innocent orgie."

The apartments of Bukatzki were luxuriously furnished, denoting the wealth and taste of the owner; and though they had the air and odor of emptiness, the spacious rooms were filled with trifles in some way or manner relating to art, paintings and engravings. In some rooms lamps were burning. Bukatzki was in horror of darkness, even when he slept. The Bordeaux was found in the cupboard, and a minute later a blue flame merrily danced under the coffee-urn. Bukatzki stretched himself on the sofa, and suddenly said:

"It may be that you doubt that I, weak as I am, have not the slightest fear of death?"

"No; but I once expressed myself that you are con-

stantly making fun of something or other, trying to deceive others and yourself. You lack a good deal of what constitutes a real man. Everything in you is pretended, artificial, assumed."

"Human stupidity amuses me."

"If you are so clever, why did you not make a better use of your own life?"

Polanetzki cast his glance around him, and added: "Look around you. With all this sumptuous luxury, you are lonely. You're killing yourself. You, too, belong to those who forever pretend! What a peculiar disease of our society! You're constantly posing—nothing else. I do sometimes. But in time it becomes a habit, and even a second nature."

Under the influence of the wine, Bukatzki regained his humor, became more talkative, but not gay.

"But there is one thing I do not deceive myself about. Whatever I could say to myself, whatever others could offer in argument, I have long since pondered on, and repeated to myself more than once. I lead a very stupid life. I am surrounded by a great nothingness, which I fear. I fill it up with the mingled assortment of odds and ends you see in this room, to leave no place for my fears. Not to dread the advent of death is a different matter, because after death one does not feel, does not think. Then I will constitute an atom of that 'nothingness;' but to be conscious of it while you are still alive, to feel it, to give yourself an account of it, this is reality. Nothing can be meaner than that. Besides, my health is very poor, and this fact robs me of energy, and that is why, having gone through my natural store of fuel, I supplement it, renew it. There is in this less pretending, less posing than you think. Of course, supplying myself with self-made fire, I look upon life from the ironical point of view; I resemble a sick man who lies on the side that is most convenient for him. I feel comfortable thus. That my pose is unnatural, I make no denial; any other pose were annoying. I consider the subject exhausted. No more of it, please."

"But you should devote yourself to something, some work."

"Work—indeed! First, though I know a lot, I am capable of doing nothing. Then I am a sick man. Besides, your advice is as unpractical as it would be to tell a paralyzed man: 'Go; walk on,' while the poor devil can scarcely drag his feet. But, enough of this! Have some more wine, and let's speak of yourself. That Plavitski is a very nice girl, and you are doing well in marrying her. What I am saying during the day is not worth remembering. She is a splendid woman, and she loves you."

Evidently excited by the wine, Bukatzki began to talk faster.

"What I am saying during the day is not worth paying attention to," repeated he, "but now it's night, we are drinking wine, and therefore let us be sincere. Have some more coffee? I love its aroma. You must always mix Mocha with Ceylon in equal parts. Now there comes the moment of divulging confidences. Do you know what I think? I cannot comprehend what happiness there can be in glory, because I am not a prey to it, but as the temple of Ephesus had long been reduced to ashes, I see no prospects. I admit, however, that if this be happiness, it is so small that a mouse could make away with it, not only for its breakfast, but after a long day in a rich pantry. I know what it is to be wealthy, because I am a wealthy man; I know what it is to travel, because I roved and roamed the whole wide world over; I know what freedom is, for I am free; I know the worth of woman—too much of her; and last, I know books. I have besides a number of paintings, engravings, china. And now, hear ye, what I have to say: All that—is naught—an absurdity, dust, in comparison with a heart that beats with love. This is the result of my life-long observations, but I have reached the end, that moral people find at the beginning."

And he feverishly began to mix his coffee with a spoon.

Polanetzki, a man of a hot temper, jumped up quickly.

"Oh, you brute?" exclaimed he, "did you not declare a few months ago that you were fleeing into Italy, only because there was no one to be in love with on those sunny

shores, that no one would love you. Do you remember? Will you attempt to deny it?"

"And what did I say this morning of your bride? I said that you were crazy, and now I say: You are doing well in marrying her! Do you expect logic from me? To chatter and to speak are two widely different things. I am more outspoken now, because wine loosened my tongue."

Polanetzki, in agitation, paced the room. "This is monstrous! Astounding!" said he. "Here is a state of things for you! So they all plead, when they are pressed to the wall."

Almost trembling, Bukatzki filled with unsteady hand another cup of coffee and continued: "It's bliss—to love, but there is something far better—to be loved! There can be nothing better than this! I would give everything for this... But I am not worth speaking of... Life—is a base fraud, a farce, written without talent. What is worse, it's often a very bad melodrama, and if life contains anything worth living for, it is the right to be beloved. Imagine, that I have never experienced it, and you—you happy man, have found, what you sought for..."

"You do not know what difficulties I had."

"I do. Vaskovski told me... It matters not... what's important:—you must know how to appreciate it."

"What do you demand? I am aware that I am loved, I appreciate it, and there the story ends."

Bukatzki put his hands on Polanetzki's shoulders.

"No, Polanetzki, though I am a fool as regards my own interests, I am still capable of observing what's going on around me. This is not the end. It's the beginning, the opening chapter. The majority of men say the same thing: 'I will marry, and that settles it,' and the majority are grievously mistaken."

"I do not comprehend this philosophy."

"I am sorry. You see, it is not enough to take a wife—you must yield, give yourself away to her, and she must be conscious of this. Do you understand?"

"Not very well."

"Bah—you feign innocence. She must not only feel herself the owner, but the commander, the autocrat. Soul

into soul! Hand into hand! Otherwise, you may break your skull. Marriages are either good or bad. Mashko's marriage, for instance, will not be good, for various reasons."

"He does not at all share this opinion. However, I am really very sorry that you have never married, since you understand it so well, how everything ought to be 'done.'"

"To understand everything and act accordingly, this would mean at the end the abolition of all precipitations, sudden falls and crashes, after which our limbs are sore and our joints are stiff. At least, can you imagine me married?"

And Bukatzki laughed his thin shrill way. His former hilarity returned to him, and with it his view of things, from a humorous standpoint.

"You will look comical enough, God knows! but imagine me! One may kill himself laughing. Two weeks hence, when on the eve of your wedding, you will see the ridiculous phase of it. Then in one crazy chaos there will be love, heart-throbbing, serious sober thoughts, a new epoch of life. The florist with the ordered bouquet, the evening dress-suit, mislaid cuff buttons, the tying of the neck-scarf, the putting on of patent-leather shoes—all together, in one word—a measly hash. Oh, save me, angels of heaven! I pity you, my dear, and I beg you not to take my words seriously. I think, the new moon is struggling through the clouds, and during the new moon I am afflicted with a mania to utter sentimental monstrosities. Everything so stupid! This new moon, and nothing else! I was meek and tame as a sheep that lost its first lamb, and might perish of a slow fire, if I did not unload on you some of my jokes..."

Polanetzki attacked him fiercely.

"I have witnessed many a stupid thing in my life, but know ye what appears to me most absurd in you? You go round and round, recognizing no authority above yourself, you are in mortal fear of truth, as of fire, because some one has spoken it before you. The devil! I have not words enough! As to yourself, my dear, you were more sincere a minute ago, than now. Now you are again like the poodle that dances on two legs. Let me tell

you that ten such Bukatzkis could not convince me that I did not win my fate in a lottery."

And he parted from Bukatzki in a rage; but in the cool air of the street he grew calm again and said to himself:

"There is the truth! That's what different Mashkos and Bukatzkis own up to when they wish to be sincere; and still I won my fate, and I will make an open secret of it."

At home he gazed for a moment at the portrait of Lida, and said loudly:

"My poor, dear pussy!"

After which he went to bed, and until Morpheus kissed his eyes he thought of Marinya with a calm feeling, that sealed the problem of his life.

Notwithstanding Bukatzki's words, he was profoundly convinced that his marriage would decide and put an end to every uncertainty.

CHAPTER XI.

"THE catastrophe," as Bukatzki expressed it, arrived at last. Polanetzki, whose sensitive mind had experienced many a sensation in his eventful past, concluded that if there are moments in a man's career when he cannot collect his thoughts, they are the days before his wedding, especially on its very eve. At times his brain was crowded with a galaxy of thoughts and impressions, disconnected, shadowy ideas he could not muster out, nor recognize. He merely felt that a new epoch had begun in his life, that he burdened himself with new, great duties, which he undertook to assume honestly and conscientiously, but at the same moment he thought: "Why is the cab not here?" and his astonishment at the delay he supplemented with a threat. "I defy them to come late. I will wring their necks!" At times he became solemn and dignified, as if he dreaded that future for which he now became responsible. He felt elated, ennobled, and at that feeling he lathered his face before the looking-glass, thinking at the same time whether or not he ought to call in a barber for that solemn occasion, to shave him and comb his rebellious curls. Marinya was in all his thoughts; he saw her as distinctly as if she were standing before him, and thought that she was now dressing, that she stood before the mirror, talking to the maid, while her tender little heart was beating fast and restlessly. He grew sentimental, and even muttered to himself: "Never fear, my darling. I won't harm you." Then he fancied himself in the future a good, considerate husband, went off into a veritable fit of emotions, and cast a yearning, loving glance at his patent-leather shoes standing under the chair, on which his frock-coat lay. From time to time he repeated to himself: "If you marry, marry in style," and added mentally that he was

an imbecile for having hesitated so long. He felt that he loved her, and at the same time feared that though the weather was fine, it might rain, that it would be cold in church, that within the next hour or so he would kneel beside Marinya, that it were better to tie his scarf in a bow, that marriage is one of the gravest ceremonies of life, that there is something sacred in it, and therefore one ought not to lose his head under any circumstances, that an hour later it will be all over, the invited guests will depart, and then will begin the normal, quiet life of husband and wife. However, these chaotic thoughts at times scattered like a flock of sparrows, and the brain of Polanetzki became a blank, and from his lips escaped incomprehensible phrases, as, for instance, "To-morrow is Wednesday, my watch, the eighth of April . . . my watch, my watch!" Then he regained composure, and repeated: "One must be an idiot . . ." and the scattered sparrows returned to his bewildered head, flock after flock, and began to circle and hover round and round.

In the meantime, Abdulski, the agent of the house of Polanetzki, Bigel & Co., who accepted the honorary office of groomsman, together with Bukatzki, arrived. A Tartar by descent, with a swarthy, yet handsome face, he looked quite presentable in his frock-coat and white cravat. Polanetzki expressed the hope that his agent would soon follow his example, and take unto himself a wife. To which Abdulski replied: "Would I could go to Heaven!" at which he made an ominous gesture to denote that his pockets were empty. Then he spoke of the Bigels, that all their children wished to be present at the wedding, and when their parents decided to take along only the oldest, pandemonium broke loose, to end which it was necessary to use some very persuasive arguments, that were not so eloquent as they were painful. Polanetzki, who had a deep affection for children, grew indignant, and said: "I will play a trick on them. Have they gone?"

"They were preparing to start a short while ago."

"All right. I will make them an impromptu visit, will take the little ones along with me, and will make

my next stop at Plavitski's and there introduce the whole brood of Bigels to their astonished mother." Abdulski expressed his doubt; he hoped that Polanetzki would not do it. But the very argument he used was so much oil to the flame. They entered the cab, they went for the disappointed children. Their nurse, knowing the intimate relations of Polanetzki toward the family of Bigel, did not dare to gainsay the proposition, and to the great horror of Panni Bigel, the groom entered Plavitski's apartments with all the children, dressed in their everyday clothes, with collars soiled and disheveled hair, but with beaming and happy, if somewhat frightened, little faces. Approaching Marinya, he kissed her gloved hand and said: "They conspired to slight the little ones. Tell me, have I done well?" Marinya liked this maneuver as a new evidence of his kindness. She was delighted at the presence of the children, and even felt a deep satisfaction when the guests called him the "future eccentric." Panni Bigel hurriedly arranging the children's costumes, repeated dolefully:

"Well, what can I do, what can I do with this maniac?"

Plavitski partly entertained the same opinion. But Polanetzki and Marinya were soon absorbed in each other, and everything else was lost sight of. Their hearts beat peacefully; he gazed at her now with amazement, then with unbounded enthusiasm. Attired in white, from her shoes to her gloves, with a green wreath crowning her head and a long trailing veil, she seemed to him another being. There was something unusual in her, something solemn, as it was with Lida. Of course, Polanetzki drew no such comparison, yet he felt that the white Marinya stood further away from him, that she disarmed him, and became inaccessible more and more, than in her ordinary dress. Beside, she lost much in appearance; a vague restlessness and agitation brought a crimson flush to her cheeks, which, owing to the white dress, looked still redder. But, strange thing, just that circumstance touched Polanetzki's heart and awoke therein a feeling akin to compassion. He understood that Marinya's heart was throbbing violently, and he began to calm her, to speak to her in such tender, caressing words, that he

finally marveled himself where he got them, and how freely and easily he made them flow. But they escaped him so easily, thanks to Marinya herself.

Her own face unmistakably betrayed the fact that though she gave herself away with a throbbing heart, but at the same time with full confidence, that she offered him not only her heart, but her very soul, her whole being, her whole life, not for one brief moment, but through life. In view of this not a shadow of a doubt clouded the clear depths of Polanetzki's soul, and this assurance, this perfect faith in himself made him at that instant the best, the kindest, the most sensitive, the most eloquent he had ever been. Now the thoughts of Polanetzki no longer scattered like sparrows; he wondered that with all his skepticism, he was so deeply affected by the solemnity of the religious rites. He was not a skeptic in reality. He longed for these religious emotions, and if he did not invoke them often, it was only due to his carelessness, because he thought so rarely of religion. But skepticism only ruffled the surface of his mind, as a light wind ruffles and agitates the surface of the sea, while the mysterious depths remain calm and undisturbed. In the same manner he detested formalities, and yet this ceremony appeared to him so imposing, so grand, so full of seriousness and solemnity, that he was prepared to yield to it with bent head. He willingly kneeled beside Marinya at the feet of her father, received his blessing and listened to his sermon, which happily was very short, because Plavitski was agitated, his voice trembled, and he could hardly pronounce a sort of invocation, imploring Polanetzki to love Marinya, and from time to time, at least, in the future, utter a prayer upon his grave, so that the path to it will not be overgrown by weeds.

The solemnity of the moment, however, was spoiled by Yusia Bigel, who, seeing the tears of Plavitski, and the kneeling forms of both Polanetzki and Marinya, a scene connected in his mind with executions in their own house where a whip played quite a prominent part, he gave vent to his compassion with the aid of such vehement cries and outburst of lamentations, of which he was only capable. When his tears were becoming contagious, the preparations

for the departure to church were hastily made. Plavitski's allusion to his grave and the path overgrown with weeds, failed to make the desired impression. . . .

Sitting in the carriage between Abdulski and Bukatzki, Polanetzki could scarcely answer in broken phrases their questions and remarks. He took no interest in their conversation, but thought that in a few more minutes would take place that of which he had dreamed for so many months, what he craved for long before Lida's death. Then he began to dream of the reality of Marinya and the wedding. At the same time Marinya prayed to her Heavenly Father, that he grant happiness to her husband; true, she asked a little of it for herself, but she was more than assured that her late sainted mother would take care of that.

Then they marched to the altar, conducted thither by the groomsmen, making their way through two rows of invited friends and curiosity-seekers. They saw everything as if through a dense mist, and perceived in the depth of the church the dimly-burning candles, and the faces of people, familiar and strange. They both saw Emilya Chavastovska clad in the white hood of a Sister of Mercy, her smiling face and eyes filled with tears, and both thought of Lida, who seemed to lead them now to the altar. One moment—and they halted there; before them a priest was kneeling at the altar. On the altar numerous candles burned, lighting with their yellowish flame the face of the center image. At last the priest began the sacred rite; the young couple repeating after him the words of the ceremony. Polanetzki, who held Marinya's hand, was seized with an excitement such as he had never experienced since his first confession and communion. He felt that it was only a mere rite, in the virtue of which man gets his right and title to a woman; but in that joining of hands, in that promise, there was some mysterious power, in short, God himself, before whom they stood with throbbing heart. Soon breaking the solemn silence, they heard the words: "*quod Deus junxit, homo non disjungat.*" Now Polanetzki was satisfied that Marinya belonged to him, body and soul, that he must be the same to her. From the gallery where the choir held forth, the organ

suddenly burst into a sea of melody, the choir sang "Veni Creator," and under its dying sounds the Polanetzkis, husband and wife, walked out of church.

At the gate Panni Chavastovska embraced Marinya and said: "God bless you!" The young couple were driven home, and the heartbroken mother went to the cemetery to tell her Lida that her "Pan Stach" was today married to Marinya.

CHAPTER XII.

Two weeks passed. One morning the porter of the hotel Bauer in Venice handed Polanetzki a letter with a Warsaw postmark, at the very moment he entered a gondola with his wife to be rowed to the church of Saint Mary. That day was the anniversary of the death of Marinya's mother, and they went to church for early mass. Knowing that no news of importance could be expected from Warsaw, he put the letter in his pocket, and asked his wife: "Are we not too early for church?"

"Yes, we have half an hour yet."

"Would you like to take a ride through the Rialto?"

Marinya was always willing and ready. It was her first trip abroad, and she was like one dreaming. Everything seemed to her a golden thought. Often, being carried away by admiration and enthusiasm, she threw herself on her husband's neck, as if it was he who laid the corner-stones of the Venetian temples of art, and that he alone was to be thanked for the beauty of Venice.

"I look, I see, and I do not believe that it's all really not a dream," said she.

Owing to the early hour, traffic was light on the Rialto. The water looked as though wrapped in slumber. The day was calm, bright, but not sunny; in a word, one of those days when the Grand Canal, with all its beauty and loveliness, is as quiet as a cemetery. The palaces seem deserted, neglected; and in their motionless reflection in the surface of the waters a profound sadness is felt. It is then that one gazes at them in silence, fearing to utter a word, lest that absolute peace and calm should be disturbed. Marinya gazed at that surface in exultation. Polanetzki, being less emotional, took the letter from his pocket and began to read.

"Ah!" said he, "Mashko has been married—their wedding took place three days after ours."

Marinya awoke. Absorbed in her dreaming, she heard not what he said, and therefore asked him to repeat.

"I said, my pretty dreamer, that Mashko was married."

"What do I care for Mashko," replied she, putting her blonde little head on his shoulders, and gazing into his eyes, "when I have my Stach?"

Polanetzki smiled like a man who permitted others to love him, but was not a bit astonished at the fact; then he kissed his wife's forehead, and devoted himself to the further perusal of the letter, which, apparently, began to interest him. But suddenly he shuddered, as if some one had stuck a pin into his arm, and loudly exclaimed:

"What a great calamity!"

"What has happened?"

"Panna Kraslovska possesses only an annuity of nine thousand, left her by her grandfather, but not a cent in the shape of dowry."

"Well, this is sufficient, aye, too much, even!"

"Too much? But listen to what Mashko writes: 'Thanks to this, my bankruptcy is a foregone conclusion, and the settling of debts a question of time.' Do you comprehend this? They were both deceived. He reckoned on her capital; she, on him."

"Well, they at least possess sufficient means to live on."

"They have that, and no more, certainly not for the payment of debts. As to myself, you, and your father—everything may be lost."

Now it was Marinya's turn to become alarmed.

"Ah, Stach!" exclaimed she, "maybe your presence there is imperative. In such case, let us return. It will be a great blow for papa!"

"I will write to Bigel at once, giving him instructions to take my place, and save from the crash whatever possible. But do not take this to your heart, dear. I will still have enough for the two of us, also for your father."

Marinya embraced him.

"Ah, how kind you are!" said she; "with a man like you, life will be made happy."

"And yet, we may save something. If Mashko gets

credit, ours will be the first claim to be paid. Perhaps he will find a purchaser for Kremen. He advises me to ask Bukatzki, to persuade him, in fact, to buy the estate. Tonight Bukatzki leaves the city for Rome, and I invited him to breakfast. I shall ask him. His is a large fortune, and he could well afford to buy it. It would supply him with the work he is constantly in search of. It will be interesting to keep posted on the future chapters of Mashko's married life. He finished this letter with the remark: 'I revealed to my wife the real condition of my affairs; she retained her composure, but her mother is violent.' He adds, furthermore, that he has fallen in love with his wife, and a separation from her would mean a real calamity. Though it concerns me but little, I am curious to know the end of this peculiar romance."

"She will not abandon him."

"I do not know. I thought so myself, but now I feel like arguing. Will you bet?"

"No, because I do not wish to win. You bad man, have you no idea what women are?"

"On the contrary, I know very well that all of them are not like her who now sits by my side in the gondola."

"In Venice, in a gondola, and beside my Stach!" exclaimed Marinya.

Meanwhile they reached their destination. After mass, they returned directly to the hotel, and found Bukatzki there, dressed for the journey in a gray, checked suit, that looked too wide and loose on his thin, emaciated figure, yellow shoes, and a fantastic scarf, negligently tied.

"I am leaving to-day," said he, greeting Polanetzki. "Do you wish me to procure lodgings for you in Florence? I am in a position to rent a palace."

"Then you will make a halt on the road?"

"Yes. First, so as to notify the people of your coming and order a rug to be spread on the stairs; second, for the sake of black coffee, which, in general, is very poor in Italy, but in Florence, at Jeakossi's, one can get along with it. By the way, this is the only thing that is well prepared in Florence."

"What a miserable habit always to say what you don't mean!"

"No, no. I sincerely think of renting apartments for you in Lung-Arno."

"We shall take in Verona."

"Oh, for the sake of Romeo and Juliet? Go, by all means, so long as you still enjoy the illusion. May be, in a month or so, it will be too late."

Panni Polanetzki stamped her little foot, and, turning to her husband, said:

"Stach, do not allow the gentleman to annoy me; he is intolerable."

"All right; I shall break his head, but only after he has had breakfast with us."

In the meantime, Bukatzki recited:

"No, it's not dawning yet,
And 'tis not the lark; 'tis the song of the nightingale."

Then, addressing Marinya, he asked:

"Has Polanetzki dedicated to you a sonnet?"

"No!"

"Oh, this is a bad sign! Look! You have a balcony facing the street, and it never occurred to him to take his position underneath and sing the sweet tune of a serenade, accompanying it himself on a mandolin?"

"No!"

"Bad; very bad!"

"There's no room here; no place to stand on—water all around!"

"That's easily solved. One can approach in a gondola. We know it not, but here, whoever is in love—really, sincerely in love—writes sonnets and hies himself to a convenient spot beneath the balcony, with mandolin in hand. This becomes an imperative duty, ascribed to the geographical position, to the waves of the sea, to chemical elements of the air and water, and whoever writes no sonnets, nor wields a mandolin under a balcony, is not in love. I could even show you volumes treating this subject most learnedly."

"I am afraid I'll have to wring his neck before breakfast," remarked Polanetzki.

However, the threat was not brought to a realization, for breakfast was announced soon after. They were

served at a separate table, but in the main dining-hall. For Marinya, who took a lively interest in everything she saw, this was a rare treat and pleasure; she had a good opportunity to observe real Englishmen. It all produced an impression upon her as if she were in some exotic region, where no living soul had ever been before. This was a source of constant jokes and scathing remarks for both Bukatzki and Polanetzki, and the trio enjoyed themselves capitally. One said that it reminded him of his youth; the other called his wife a field daisy, and added that it was a pleasure to show such a daisy to the world.

Bukatzki, however, noticed that the daisy had plenty of good, refined taste, and sincere liking for art. She knew many objects from having seen them described in books and drawings. Having scant knowledge of many things, she frankly confessed her ignorance, and in that confession there was nothing artificial, nothing pretended; if she liked anything, her enthusiasm was sincere and unbounded. Bukatzki frequently poked fun at her, and said that all connoisseurs of art possess a peculiarly gifted mind; that she, as a sensitive and still unspoiled woman, is to him the guiding star in many questions of art, but her opinion and verdict might have been much more valuable had she been only ten years old.

At breakfast the discussion of art had given place to the exchange of news from Warsaw.

"I received a letter from Mashko," said Polanetzki.

"So did I," replied Bukatzki.

"You? Then Mashko is seriously involved, it seems. He must be pressed to the wall, with no prospect of succor or relief. Do you know of his embarrassment?"

"Yes; he is wasting his eloquence persuading me, or, rather, entreating me, to buy from him—do you know what?"

Bukatzki purposely omitted the mention of Kremen, prompted by delicacy and fear to hurt Marinya. He knew what a source of trouble and unpleasantness it had created for the two.

Polanetzki conceived the reason of his silence and therefore retorted:

"There was a time when we avoided mentioning that name, as one fears to touch a sore wound, but now it's different. One cannot be cautious all his life."

Bukatzki cast a quick glance at Marinya; she was blushing.

"Stach is right," said she. "Besides, I understand that Kremen is the subject of his letter."

"You are quite right. Kremen was alluded to."

"Well, and what is your decision?" asked Polanetzki.

"I will not buy, if only not to create the impression that Kremen is thrown around like a ball."

Panni Polanetzki blushed more and more. "I never think of it now."

Her husband looked at her approvingly, shook his head and replied:

"Which last fact only proves again that you are a sensible child."

"Naturally," continued Marinya, "if Mashko breaks down, Kremen will be divided into parts, will fall into the hands of usurers . . . All this is not very pleasant to contemplate."

"Aha!" exclaimed Bukatzki—"this means that you have not forgotten it entirely!"

Panni Polanetzki cast a restless glance at her husband, who laughed gaily:

"You are in for it, dear. He caught you on the word!" Wherewith he turned to Bukatzki and added:

"It is evident that Mashko relies on your assistance. In you he sees his anchor of salvation."

"But I am not an anchor . . . I am a straw, and whoever grasps it will surely go to the bottom. Besides, Mashko himself told me: 'your nerves are getting dull.' May be, he is right! But just because of this, I am in need of strong sensations. Were I to assist Mashko, he might perhaps, land on his feet again, but then he will surely continue to play the lord, and his wife—the lady of the upper world. The pair would be too much *comme il faut*, which would leave me no alternative but to look upon the dullest of comedies, which I have seen before and been in danger of breaking my jaw from yawning. Well, this won't do! If I don't help him, he'll be ruined,

no doubt ; something extraordinary will occur as a sequel, some tragedy perhaps, which will entertain and amuse me for a while. And so, judge for yourself ; for a dull, witless comedy I am expected to pay thousands, while I can see a tragedy without paying a copper. There is no room for hesitation here."

"How can you utter such words!" ejaculated Panni Polanetzki.

"Not only *can* I *do* it, but I will write the same to Mashko, for that man deceived me in the most brutal manner!"

"How?"

"He made me believe that he was a scoundrel with a dirty character, heartless, conscienceless. In the meantime, it transpires that in some corner of his heart, there remained a ledge of absolute honesty ; that he wishes to satisfy his creditors, that he is sorry for that red-eyed doll, and that parting with her would be an awful blow! And all this he writes to me in the most shamefaced way! Why this is an outrage! Moving in such society as ours, one cannot be sure of anything. Involuntarily one spends years abroad, because he cannot endure such things."

Panni Polanetzki was greatly angered.

"If you don't cease to give expression to such views, I will ask my Stach to sever all relations with you," said she in a rage.

Polanetzki shrugged his shoulders.

"You are, indeed, a most peculiar man ; you are always joking and talking nonsense, and will never say a sensible word, in humane fashion. I do not persuade you to buy Kremen, though I am interested in it myself to a great extent, but I must tell you, that the acquiring of Kremen might create for you a new field of usefulness, a new occupation."

Bukatzki burst into laughter.

"I told you long ago that, first. I like to do what is most pleasant to me, and by doing nothing, I am doing so. And if you are so clever, prove to my satisfaction where I have uttered a folly. Secondly, I become a farmer! How ridiculous! Why it is above and beyond all comprehension! I, to whom fine or rainy weather merely constitute

a question whether to carry a cane or an umbrella, shall in my old days stand on one foot like a pelican blinking at the sun, and wait for his pleasure and caprice to warm or wet the earth? Shall I be consumed by care and anxiety about the good or poor crops of wheat, feel wretched if an infectious plague shall ruin my potato-patch, work like a slave to gather my beans in time and furnish a certain Utzka with as many measures of grain as is specified in the contract, live in constant agony of fear lest my horses shall become diseased, and my sheep snow-stormed? Shall I come to all that, to become dull and babbling, repeating constantly after every two or three words: 'so, so my dearest,' or 'what in the devil did I wish to say,' or, God knows what not, . . . Voyons! Pas si bête! Shall I, a free man, become glebœ adscriptus, a 'dear neighbor,' a 'brother-farmer,' a 'dearest Matneinshka,' a 'Lechit.' No, no, not for anything in the world!"

And Bukatzki, excited by wine and his own eloquence, recited the words of Shliza from the poem "Lilla Veneda:"

"What's that? Am I a Lechit?
So drunk and rough to behold.
Do all the vices cling to me?"

"Here, Here! Speak to him!" retorted Polanetzki—and yet you're partly right."

Marinya sat, thoughtful and silent, and when Bukatzki finished his monologue about the cares of housekeeping, she cast off her sad musings, and said: "During the protracted illness of my father who was never as well in Kremen as he has been the last few years, I could relieve him but little in his work on the estate. Gradually I became accustomed to it, and even grew to like it. Though the cares and tribulations were many, they contained an element of undoubted pleasure, and I was at a loss to understand whence those elements came. I was enlightened by Pan Yamish. He told me that the whole world, the welfare of the universe, depends upon the labor of the farmer. All others are either natural consequences, or artificial means to kill time. Then I myself saw through things he never mentioned to me. Often, going into the open

field in early spring, I saw everything growing, and I was conscious that my heart was beating faster with joy. And the reason is obvious: because in all relations of man to man, there can be entwined a lie, falsehood; but the earth—is truth itself. You cannot cheat the earth, and she—whether she will yield the expected crop or not, will not cheat. I love the earth, as the truth, and because we love her she teaches us to love . . . The dew falls not only upon plants in general, but also as it were upon the soul of mankind, that becomes nobler, more perfect. Dealing with Truth, one draws nearer to God . . . This is why I loved my Kremen so well.”

And the young woman, frightened at her own bold speech, and uncertain of what her Stach would say, became confused. Her eyes sparkled and shone like bright stars, and her face mirrored all her hidden thoughts.

Bukatzki gazed at her, as at a newly-discovered Venetian painting, then hid half of his little face in his fantastic scarf, and finally muttered: “Delicieuse! . . . You are perfectly right!” protruding his beard from beyond his scarf.

But the logical young woman would not allow him to get off with compliments.

“If I am right,” said she, “then you are utterly wrong!”

“That is another story. If you are right, it’s only because it becomes your face so well, and such a woman is always right.”

“Stach!” exclaimed she, addressing her husband.

But there was so much charm in her. She was so entirely bewitching, that he fairly devoured her with his eyes. He was a picture of enthusiasm; his eyes were laughing, his nostrils dilated; he closed her little mouth with his hand.

“Ah, child! child!” repeated he, and bent over her. “If we were not in the main dining-room, I would cover these eyes and lips with kisses.”

Saying this Polanetzki at that moment made a grave mistake. It was not sufficient to admire the physical beauty of Marinya, to exult at the exquisite color of her face, eyes and lips; it was necessary to understand her, to feel with her, to look into the depths of her soul. That

confess. He loves his nest, his Pognebin, situated somewhere near Poznan. Am I right? And he loves it, because he was born there. Had he been born in Guadalupe, he would have loved that island just as much. This love, by the way, proved his salvation in life. This man positively exasperates me, and, tell me, is it not a shame?"

Panni Polanetzki looked at Svirski with her blue eyes and said: "Pan Bukatzki is not as bad as he appears to be, because he said about you the best one could probably expect from him."

"Well, I will at least die in peace now," murmured Bukatzki,— "I have at last been understood."

In the meantime Svirski stared at Marinya, as only an artist can, without insulting a woman. Evidently he was greatly interested in her, and finally he muttered:

"You can't see such a jewel of a head here in Venice. This is absolutely marvelous, fabulous!"

"What's that?" asked Bukatzki.

"I said, that Madame Polanetzki is a peculiar type. For instance, this (and he passed his finger over his own nose, lips and chin) and what purity of features!"

"Is it not true?" exclaimed Polanetzki enthusiastically, "I always thought the same!"

"I bet that you never thought of it," challenged Bukatzki.

Polanetzki was proud that his wife attracted the attention of a noted artist, therefore he added: "If it will give you pleasure to paint her portrait, it will give me a still greater one to buy it."

"I would gladly do it," simply replied Svirski, "but to-day I leave for Rome, where I have already begun the portrait of Panni Osnovski."

"We shall be there in about ten days."

"All right; it's a bargain."

Marinya blushed to her very ears, and thanked the artist.

Bukatzki bade the Polanetzkis farewell, and took Svirski along with him.

"We have plenty of time yet," said he, on reaching the street. "Let's go in to Florian and have a glass of cognac."

he did not sympathize with her, was betrayed by his
 ressing words: "child! child!"

At that moment, it appeared, he looked up
 upon a beautiful child, and thought of nothing.

Meanwhile coffee was set on the table.

"Pardon me. I was almost on the
 something clever. . . . Pardon, madam
 more. Apparently I scorched my tongue
 and therefore almost made a slip; I
 hot on the advice of clever people
 headaches, and my head aches."

Bukatzki put his hand on his forehead directly, but
 his eyes and sat silent in thought to himself:

"Everything is spoken. We were always loath-
 my head is aching, oh, but there are always demands,
 go, but the artist Svirski makes sacrifices. An illustration:
 to Florence. This is a good man, but she possesses just as much
 ine renown. No, as he does; therefore, their life will be
 with aquarelle."

In fact, a planet, as it were, which must circle round him—and it's
 called for his own good. He will be her sun, that
 to look upon her, give her warmth and tender-
 glimmer her his property, a sort of miniature
 built already within him a certain self-confidence that
 an already lodged within him a certain self-confidence that
 n There is no doubt. He will own her and her income. She will
 f enrage me. He will own her and her income. She will
 own him—without an income. He will allow himself to
 be beloved, considering this love a virtue, a caress, a kind-
 ness; and she will love him, and deem this love a happi-
 ness, a duty. Look at him—at this beaming little god!
 I really am consumed with a desire to go back and tell
 them that, but I am afraid to mar their happiness."

Conversing, they reached Florian's, sat at a table, and
 a moment later were served with cognac. Svirski was
 meditating for some time, then he said:

"And if she is really made happy by such a love?"

"She would have been just as happy with a new pair of
 eyeglasses; she is near-sighted."

"Go to Hades! This would not become her."

"Ah, you detest this. I—the other!"

"Because your head is like a coffee-grinder, which
 grinds and grinds, until everything is reduced to a fine

powder. Well, speaking generally, what do you require of love?"

—require of love? Absolutely nothing, my dear; may the devil take him who wants anything from me. I am sick and lame, and dejected from that very cause. But were I another man, could I but define what I ought to be, and had I desired anything from him, I would wish——"

What? Go it, my lad!"

It might consist of two equal parts—desire

for a glass of cognac, and added:

—something clever, if not foolish. How-

ever, I really don't care!"

—that was not at all foolish."

I tell you, I don't care!"

CHAPTER XIII.

ONE week after his arrival in Florence, Polanetzki received a letter from Bigel, pertaining to the business of their firm. It contained such favorable news that it surpassed all his expectation. The law forbidding the exporting of grain abroad had already been published, but there was a great amount of grain in their possession which they managed to export before the publication of the imperial decree, and, as the prices abroad at once took an upward jump, the two partners achieved a great success. The speculation, begun on a large scale, proved so profitable that they became at once not only well-to-do, but rich. Though Polanetzki felt assured from the start that the speculation would yield them large gains, he rejoiced at the news for two reasons, from both the financial standpoint, and from the standpoint of his own vanity. Success always strengthens one's belief in himself. He could not help boasting of his good luck before his wife, convincing her that he was a man of no average capability; that he was far superior to his environments. Naturally, he found in her a sympathetic listener, ready and willing to accept anything for the genuine coin.

"You are a woman," said he, with just a hint at superiority, "and I will not proceed to burden you with all unnecessary details or make explanations. I will give you a plain illustration: Yesterday I was not in a position to buy for you that medallion with the black jewel we both saw at Godon's; but to-day it shall be yours."

The wife thanked him, and begged him not to buy it, but he, kissing her, insisted that it was a decided question, that she would be the owner of that jewel, which would grace her white neck so bewitchingly.

"I will not discuss people who do nothing," continued he, smiling and pacing the room. "For instance, Bukat-

zki, who is known as a never-do-well, or such asses like Kopovski. I will take such people that, from a casual view, seem to be able and clever. Say, Bigel, for instance. It never struck him to grasp this idea. He would begin to ponder, to calculate, to postpone, to fear, and let time fly away. And the whole thing is what? One must be shrewd, take a pencil, and make a lightning calculation. If you do a thing, do it quickly, or give it up. Of course, one must be prudent, sober, not to pretend or pose. Though Mashko seems not to be stupid, yet see what a mess he got himself into? I shall not follow in his steps."

Pacing the room, he shook his black curls. Marinya listened to him with perfect confidence.

In Rome he ceased to think of his own greatness. His brain was crowded with so many outer impressions, that there was no more room for such reflections. Once, returning home with Marinya, tired from a long day's sight-seeing, he recalled unwillingly the words of Bukatzki, who, in the capacity of their guide, often declared: "You have not seen a thousandth part of what is worth seeing; but this is all right, as one is foolish to come here, just as he is foolish to stay at home."

Bukatzki was frequently afflicted with contradictory moods, and contradicted every opinion of his own, which he affirmed tenaciously only a while before. Professor Vaskovski came to them from Perugia. This visit gave Marinya so much delight that she greeted him as she would a relative. However, after the first impulse of joy was over, she noticed a gloom in the old man's eyes.

"What is ailing you?" asked she, "don't you get along well in Italy?"

"No, my child," replied he. "In Perugia, as in Rome, life is very good—oh, how good! Wandering through these streets, one thinks that he tramples under foot the dust of the entire world. This is, as I once said, the threshold, the ante-chamber, to another world, only—"

"Only what?"

"Only the people—of course, not from malice—because here, like everywhere, there are more good people than bad—but it pains me to see that here, as in our own land, people think me insane."

"Then you have no more reason to be sad here than at home?" said Bukatzki.

"Yes. Only there I still have friends, like you, who love me, but here— And then, I am homesick."

And the old man turned to Polanetzki.

"Local papers have published reviews of my book in their columns. Some of them plainly ridicule it—God be with them! Others agree that a new era must begin by the reincarnation of Christ and His spirit into action. One of the critics admitted that individuals live among them in Christian manner, while nations live like heretics. They called my doctrine great, but even he, discussing what I said about the mission being entrusted by God Himself to the youngest of his own, laughed till his sides would split. And this is insulting. They evidently want me to understand that there is something the matter with me here."

And poor Vaskovski rapped his forehead. However, after a pause, he added: "Of course, a man often throws a seed into the ploughed ground with great misgiving, but it takes root, rises above ground, and yields fruit."

Then he began to inquire about Panni Chavastovska, and finally, casting a fond glance at the young pair, he asked, naively:

"Well, and how are you? Do you live well together?"

Instead of an answer, Marinya ran to her husband, and, pressing her head to his breast, whispered:

"See how well! Do you see, professor?"

Polanetzki tenderly patted her head with his hand.

CHAPTER XIV.

A WEEK later Polanetzki took his wife to Svirski, whom they now met daily, and whom they learned to like more and more. He was now about to begin work on her portrait. They found there Pan and Panni Osnovski, whose acquaintance it was easy to renew, as they met before at some formal affair. Once Polanetzki was presented to Panni Osnovski at Ostende, and now he recalled the fact to her. He did not remember, however, the exact time it happened, but it probably took place during that period of his life when, at the sight of every girl, he queried himself: "Will this be my wife?" Then she was a very pretty, though somewhat frivolous, girl. She was now about twenty-six or twenty-seven years old. Tall, with a fresh, dark face, cherry lips, long hair done up in braids, and partly crooked eyes, she resembled a Japanese, with a knack for mischief, and a venomous tongue. She behaved very strangely, shrugged her shoulders, and stuck out her chest, the result of which was a figure nicknamed by Bukatzki "en effrande." No sooner did she form the acquaintance of Marinya than she began to chat, and babble, trying to convince Marinya that they ought to become intimate friends, because they posed for the same painter. To Polanetzki she intimated that she remembered him at the ball at Ostende as being a lovely dancer; that she was now delighted to avail herself of his invitation, and to both she declared that she was elated to form their acquaintance; that Rome intoxicated her; that she read "Cosmopolis;" that she is enamored of the villa Doria, and the paintings of Pincio; she hoped to visit together with them the Catacombs, with which she is familiar, the works of Rossi, etc., etc. And then, giving her hand to Svirski, and coquettishly smiling to Polanetzki, she went away, with the explanation, that she yielded her

place to one more worthy than herself, leaving behind her an impression of a storm, a Japanese, and an odor of flowers. Pan Osnovski, still a very young man, with a commonplace but kind blonde face, scarcely uttered a word, and trailed along after her. Svirski heaved a deep sigh.

"There is a storm for you!" exclaimed he, "it's impossible to keep her quiet for two minutes. . . . She's a real burden to me."

"But what an interesting face!" interfered Marinya. "May I see her portrait?"

"Yes, you can see it now, it's all but finished."

The Polanetzki's approached the easel, and for a moment stood speechless from admiration. The head done in aquarelle produced the impression of an oil painting in which was expressed the spiritual warmth of the whole being of Panni Osnovski. Svirski listened calmly to their lavish praise, and was, apparently, delighted with his work. Then he covered the portrait, carried it away into a dark corner of the room, seated Panni Polanetzki in a chair and began to examine her closely. She was confused by that fixed gaze and she blushed, but Svirski smiled and in self-contentment, muttered: "Yes, this is altogether another type—a wide contrast—heaven and earth!"

At times he closed one eye, and, what perplexed Marinya still more, approached the paper, then made a few steps backwards, again riveted on her his glance, and spoke as if to himself: "There I had to catch the devil, to squeeze the life out, here there is a fascinating femininity."

"As long as you have discovered it at once," remarked Polanetzki, "we can rest perfectly assured that the portrait will be a creation of art."

Svirski ceased looking at Marinya, and turning to Polanetzki, laughed merrily, showing his strong white teeth.

"Yes," said he, "perfect femininity, and this is the main feature of your wife's face."

"And you will catch it, as you caught the devil in that other portrait."

"Stach!" exclaimed Marinya.

"But these are not my words, they belong to Pan Svirski."

"If you prefer it, we will call her not a devil, but a

little devil. . . . And a pretty, though dangerous little devil, she is. Generally, when drawing, I like to observe various objects. Panni Osnovski is a very curious type."

"Why?"

"Have you noticed her husband?"

"Very little, I was interested in the woman."

"You see! she always shuts him out of view with her own personage, he is scarcely visible. But the worst thing is, that she herself sees him not. And yet he is an honest chap, splendidly educated, well bred, extremely delicate, rich, and by no means a fool, besides his love for her borders on insanity."

Svirski began to work, and distractedly added:

"Yes—on insanity—arrange your hair at the ear, please. If your husband is talkative, he will shortly be in despair. Bukatzki said that as soon as I begin to work, I am always chatting, giving no one a chance to utter a word. You see, she, Panni Osnovski, might be as pure as a tear, but she's a terrible coquette. Hers is a cold heart and a flaming head. A dangerous type, a very dangerous type. She, one might say, swallows books, and of course, French novels. In them she studies psychology, gets her information about female temperaments, their problematic character, seeks to discover riddles in herself, which she has not, finds qualities of which she was unconscious but yesterday, considers herself clever, and neglects her husband."

"But, you are a terrible man!" remarked Marinya.

"Yes! Yes!" said Polanetzki, "my wife will hide herself to-morrow, when it is time for the sitting."

"Why hide yourself! This is another type altogether. Osnovski is not a fool, but people, and moreover with your permission, women, are often so dull-witted, that if somebody's mind and wit does not attack the nose, if the man is somewhat in doubt of his own faculties, if he does not scratch like a cat, does not cut like a knife, they do not appreciate such a man. I have observed that hundreds of times in my life."

Svirski closed one eye, looked again at Marinya, and continued: "And how foolish is our human society in general! I often put the question to myself: 'Why

are honest characters and kindness estimated at a lower standard than sense, cleverness? Why are there in our social life two different epithets: smart or foolish, and why not use instead: honest or dishonest.

"Because the mind is a lantern which lights the path of honesty and kindness, the path of the heart, pure and tender," protested P'olanetzki, "or else without it we would break our noses, or, what's worse, would break somebody else's."

Marinya said nothing, but on her beaming face one could read the words:

"Oh, how clever is my Stach."

"Of course, I do not speak of Osnovski," added he, "because I know him not."

"Osnovski loves his wife—like a wife, like his child, like his dearly-bought happiness, while her head is full of God-knows-what trash, and she does not pay him with mutuality. Being a bachelor, I take great interest in the fair sex, therefore I discuss this couple day after day, especially with Bukatzki, as long as they attracted his attention, which now seems to be on the wane. Bukatzki divides the dear ladies of her calibre into spiritual plebeians—shallow little souls, and spiritual patricians—noble characters filled with higher ideas, based on principles, not on phrases. And he is partly right; still I prefer to make a more simple division, namely, grateful and ungrateful creatures."

Again he stepped back from the easel, closed one eye, took a small looking-glass, looked at the reflection of the portrait, and continued:

"You will ask what I understand by grateful and ungrateful hearts," he addressed Marinya. "A grateful heart, in my estimation, is that which feels that it is loved, which is permeated with that love, which pays love with love, appreciates it and respects it; an ungrateful heart seeks only love, and the more it is certain of, the less it pays attention to it, the more it neglects and tramples it under foot. It is sufficient to fall in love with an ungrateful woman, that she should cease to love. The fisherman worries but little about the fish entangled in his meshes, just as little as Osnovski cares for her husband.

It is, indeed, the most vulgar, rough form of egoism, truly Arabian, and therefore God save Pan Osnovski, and punish the wife with her Japanese eyes of the color of sweet violet, and grotesque coiffure. To paint her portrait is bad enough, but to marry her, that's absurd! You would not believe in what abject terror I am of ungrateful women. That is why I am a bachelor still, although I have seen forty summers."

"Yes; but such women ought to be easily recognized," remarked Panni Polanetzki.

"Hardly—especially when a man, being in love, loses his head." And Svirski, bending back his athletic figure, gazed critically at the sketch, and added:

"Well, that will do for to-day. I chatted and prattled so long that all the flies perished from fright. To-morrow, as soon as you feel bored with my chatter, please clap your hands. I do not waste much breath with Panni Osnovski—she speaks for both of us. And what a bewildering number of names of books she mentions during one hour's conversation. Well, but this is not important. What did I want to say? Ah, yes; that you have a grateful heart."

Polanetzki burst out laughing, and invited Svirski to dinner, having promised to invite Bukatzki and Vaskovski also.

"I am delighted to accept your invitation," replied Svirski, "because I am perfectly lonely here. And as the weather is excellent, I propose to take advantage of the full moon and look at the Coliseum by moonlight."

"The dinner was not marked by the peculiar eccentric discussion of Bukatzki—he did not come, he was ill—Svirski and Vaskovski liked each other from the very first moment, and became fast friends. Svirski loved to chatter only when at his work, at all other times he liked and knew how to listen to others. Notwithstanding the fact that the old pedagogue appeared to him comical with his antiquated views, he saw in him, however, so much natural kindness and sincerity that he could not help but sympathize with him. He was struck by his mystic face and the expression of his eyes. Making mentally a rough sketch of his portrait on visionary paper, he listened to his

pet arguments about the youngest of the Aryans, and thought how nice it would be to catch an opportune moment and reproduce this head on canvas or paper.

Toward the end of the dinner Vaskovski asked Panni Polanetzki if she wished to see the Pope, adding that in three days there will arrive in Rome the Belgian pilgrims, which they could all join. Svirski, who knew the whole of Rome, and most of the Monsignors, assured them that he could arrange it very easily. The old man glanced at him attentively, then asked: "Then you are a genuine Roman?"

"Yes; for sixteen years."

"So. Pardon me."

Vaskovski became confused; he feared to make a blunder. However, yearning to know how and what to think of such a sympathetic man, he overcame his timidity and inquired:

"Are you from the Quirinal or the Vatican?"

"I am from Pognebin, Poland," replied Svirski with a frown.

Dinner was at an end, which put also an end to further conversation and explanation. Panni Polanetzki could scarcely sit at the table, highly elated at the thought that she would see in the moonlight the Capitolium, the Forum, and the Coliseum. A couple of hours later they rode down the Corso, lighted by electricity, toward the historical ruins. The night was calm and warm, and the vicinity of the Forum and Coliseum was deserted, which happens often even in the daytime. In the neighborhood of the temple Santa Maria Liberatrice, some one was playing a flute, at an open window. In the perfect stillness of the night, every note, was distinctly heard. Over the front part of the Forum, a deep shadow fell from the mound and the Capitolium. The farther façade was flooded in a bright green light, as well as the Coliseum, which, from a distance, looked silvery. The carriage halted near the arches of the gigantic circus. All went inside and advanced toward the center of the arena, dodging through the dirt, fragments of columns, niches, piles of brick, stones, and low arches. Being under the awe-inspiring impression of emptiness and silence, no one could utter a word.

Through the arches penetrated the pale rays of the moon, which seemed to rest on the floor of the arena, on the walls, the stoops, cracks in the walls, on the silvery moss that covered here and there the majestic ruins. Some parts of the edifice, wrapped in impenetrable darkness, produced the impression of black, mysterious openings. From the openings midst the dirt and rubbish, breathed the cold and dampness of ruin and solitude. The colossal ruin, it seemed, lost its real, original form, and became a dreamy vision, or, rather, a quaint, peculiar impression, made up of the stillness of night, the full moon, and sad memories of the great epoch full of blood and misery. Svirski first broke the gruesome silence, saying, in dreamy a voice :

"What an ocean of tears, what torture, what tragedy! Let men say whatever they please, but in Christianity there was a good deal of the superhuman, the unnatural—and this no one can deny. Think ye," added he, addressing Panni Polanetzki, "of all the power, the whole world, millions of people, iron laws, force, organization never surpassed before, greatness, glory, hundreds upon hundreds of legions, a gigantic people that ruled the universe, and that Palatin that governed the city! It would appear that no power on earth could destroy or demolish it; and yet two men there came, two apostles, Peter and Paul, not with weapons in their hands, but with mighty words on their lips—and there, look upon the ruins: at the Palatin—ruins; on the Forum—ruins; over the entire city, ruins, and crosses, crosses, crosses everywhere!"

Once more silence ensued, broken only by the caressing sounds of the flute that came from the direction of the Santa Maria Liberatrice.

"There was a cross here," said Vaskovski, pointing to the arena, "but they destroyed it."

But Polanetzki thought of Svirski's words, for they had for him a more subtle meaning than they could have for a man who overcame his spiritual strife.

"Yes, indeed, there is in all this something superhuman," said he, replying to Svirski's words—"as if a certain Truth looked into your eyes like this moon."

They were approaching the exit, when suddenly on the outside there was heard the clattering of horses' hoofs, and in the dark niche leading to the centre of the arena echoed steps loud and distinct, and a moment later two dark figures came out from the shadow into the light. One of them was attired in a gray dress, which in the pale glimmer of the room sparkled like steel, and drawing nearer to take a better view, suddenly called out: "Good evening! What a lovely night! We, too, came to admire the old ruins of the Coliseum. But, what a wonderful night!"

Polanetzki recognized the voice of Panni Osnovski. She spoke, however, in a tone so soft, as the flute, the sounds of which reached them from a distance.

"I will soon begin to believe in forebodings," added she, "because, coming here, I felt sure of finding familiar faces. But what a marvelous night!"

CHAPTER XV.

ON their return to the hotel, the Polanetzki, to their amazement, found the calling-card of the Osnovskis. They felt embarrassed, for, being younger, it was their duty to make the first call. They decided, however, to repay them in a visit on the following day. Bukatzki, who had known the Osnovskis for some time, notwithstanding the poor condition of his health (he could scarcely drag his feet), could not refrain from poking fun at the interesting pair, as soon as he was left alone with Polanetzki.

"She will flirt with you to her heart's content, but if you think that she will fall in love with you, you are sadly mistaken. She somewhat resembles a razor. She wants a leather-strap for smoothing its keen edge, and in this case you will be that strop."

"I have no desire to accept this office, and, besides, it's too early in the game."

"Too early? Then you hope for a future?"

"No; this means that I think of something else; that I love Marinya too much, that Panni Osnovski will sooner lose her keenness on me than improve herself."

In saying this Polanetzki was perfectly sincere; his thoughts were really occupied with something else; he was too honest to betray his wife; at any rate, it was too early to think of that. He felt so confident in himself that he would gladly stand the test, and rejoice in the conviction that Panni Osnovski broke her pretty teeth on him. After breakfast the Polanetzki went to Svirski's studio. The sitting did not last long, for Svirski had to be present at a certain gathering of artists, and he was in a hurry. They returned home, and a quarter of an hour later Pan Osnovski arrived. After a brief conversation with him, Polanetzki was carried away with an impres-

sion of fellow-feeling bordering on pity; At the same time, Panni Polanetzki felt toward the man a lively sympathy and interest. She was subdued by his goodness, delicacy, and his affection for his wife. It seemed to her that all the good qualities he possessed were stamped on his fairly-handsome face. After a formal greeting, Osnovski began to converse with Polanetzki, with the air and freedom of a man accustomed to good society.

"I come to you on an errand of my wife, with a proposal. Thank Heaven that the ceremony of visits is dispensed with, though, to be frank, it ought not be observed abroad. But to return to the proposal: we want to go to-day to the church of Saint Paul, and then to Tre Fontane, located beyond the city. This is a curious monastery, that has a beautiful view of the surroundings. We would be delighted to have you accompany us."

Polanetzki knew that his wife was always ready to venture on all possible excursions, but at the same time he thought: "If Panni Osnovski wants to break her teeth on me—let her!"

"I willingly accept," replied he, "but I don't know how my superior authority will look upon this invitation."

But the "superior authority" was not sure that the "subaltern" spoke sincerely, and only seeing him smile, dared to decide: "I am delighted, I'm sure, but will it not be too much trouble to you?"

"On the contrary, we will be pleased, and in a quarter of an hour you may expect us here."

And indeed at the time appointed, they were all on the way to Tre Fontane. The Japanese eyes of Panni Osnovski sparkled with pleasure. Attired in a dress of the color of Iris, and a manteau over her slim waist, she could be called the eighth wonder or a mermaid.

Before they reached St. Paul, Polanetzki could not comprehend in what manner Panni Osnovski, who spoke not a word, inspired him with the thought, or instilled within him the idea:

"Though your wife is a dear little woman, she is a provincial after all; as to my hubby—he does not count. Only we two can understand each other and exchange impressions."

However, he determined to tease her.

When they reached St. Paul, which Panni Osnovski persisted in calling, "San Paolo fuori le mura," her husband wanted to stop the driver, but she retorted:

"We shall halt here on our homeward trip. We will know then how much time we can spare, but now let us go to Tre Fontane.

She then turned to Polanetzki and added;

"There are in that monastery an abundance of good things, concerning which I was going to ask you some questions."

"Your questions will be fruitless," replied Polanetzki. "I am not a savant."

It was soon proven that Osnovski knew more than the rest about the various places and monuments. Poor man! from morning to night he labored conscientiously making a study of the guide-book to be of use to his wife and gain her favor and admiration for his knowledge. But she heeded not his explanations only because they were made by him. She was more pleased with Polanetzki's confidence in himself and his declaration that he had no idea of antiquities.

Beyond St. Paul opened a view of Campagna with her water-dams and water system, and canals which seemed to hurry into the city, and further into the Albanian mountains, lost in the blue distance. Panni Osnovski gazed dreamily at the lofty mountains and finally asked:

"Have you ever been at Albani and at Nemi?"

"No," replied Polanetzki—"the sitting at Svirski's shortens our leisure time, and we cannot undertake long excursions, till the portrait is finished."

"We have been there already, but if you intend to go, pray, take me along, will you? I hope, you will permit?" turning to Marinya. "Though I will be, as the saying goes, the fifth wheel in the carriage, but it really matters not. Besides, I will sit very quietly in a corner of your carriage and not a word will I utter—not-a-word. All right?"

"Oh, child! child!" interposed Osnovski.

"My husband does not believe that I am enchanted by Nemi, but it's a fact, I am indeed deeply in love with it.

When I was there, it seemed to me, that Christianity had never reached that enchanted spot, that at night priests came out and performed over the blue lake their heretic rites and ceremonies. In short, silence, mystery—this is Nemi. You will not believe, that when I was there, I was suddenly seized with a desire to become a hermitess, and that yearning has never vanished. I would build me a tent on the banks of the lake, would walk around in a long gray dress, resembling the garment of St. Francisco d'Assisi, and barefooted, too. Oh, what wouldn't I give to become an hermitess! . . ."

"And what would have become of me, Anette?" asked the husband, half seriously, half jokingly.

"You would soon become consoled!" she answered curtly.

"Naturally," she continued, "I would have to subsist on alms, and therefore, from time to time, come in contact with people; and if you came to Nemi, I would come up to you and whisper slowly and appealingly:

"Un soldo! Un soldo!"

She held out to Polanetzki her small hand, and humbly repeated: "Un soldo per la povera, un soldo!"

And she looked into his eyes, while her husband explained to Panni Polanetzki. "The name Tre Fontane is applied to the place because it possesses three springs. St. Paul was executed there, and since then a legend exists that the apostle's head bounded upward three times, and on those places springs were formed. The whole locality belongs to the Trappists. Before it was dangerous to spend a night there, the place reeked with fever, but the infectious disease has vanished since the mountains have been planted with large forests of eucalyptus trees. There you can see them already with the naked eye!"

In the meantime Panni Osnovski, leaning back and slightly closing her eyes, said to Polanetzki:

"The air of Rome intoxicates me, and I am like one insane. I am by no means exacting or pretentious at home, being contented with what life gives us, but here I am growing demoralized. I feel that I lack something . . . Yet I know not what it is myself. Here the air is full of forebodings, misgivings, . . . one constantly yearns for

something. May be it is not nice, not proper. May be, I am not in place. But I always spoke and do speak now whatever I mean. When I was a tot I was called naïve. I ought to ask my hubby to take me away from here. Perhaps it will be best to live in our own close narrow shell, like a turtle or a bivalve."

"Only turtles and clams thrive well in shells, but not birds, especially birds of paradise, of which the saying goes that they were legless, and therefore cannot either stand or sit, but are compelled to fly and fly forever."

"A beautiful saying!" replied Panni Osnovski, and raising her hands began to wave them, as with wings, adding:

"And always so, in the air, in the air!"

She was flattered by that comparison, at the same time she was astonished that Polanetzki spoke in almost serious tone, almost ironically. He began to interest her, because she discovered in him more intelligence than she expected. She also understood, however, that it would be much more difficult to conquer him than she thought.

At last they reached their destination, they visited the garden, the church, the chapel, in which under the ground three springs were throbbing full of life.

Osnovski communicated to them all the information he obtained from his guide-book, in his monotonous voice. Panni Polanetzki listened attentively.

"However," thought Polanetzki, "to live with this man three hundred and sixty-five days a year must be a hard task."

This last circumstance partly extenuated Panni Osnovski in his eyes, who, playing the bird of paradise, did not rest a moment on the earth or on any other object. First of all she drank some liquor of eucalyptus, brewed at the monastery, to be used as a mean of prevention against fever, then declared that if she were a man, she would positively become a Trappist, then she recollected that she liked the occupation of seamen—"always between skies and water—just like the infinite." At last she expressed the desire to become a famous writer, who realistically characterizes the emotions of the soul, semi-conscious feelings, untold wishes, all forms, colors and

shades. Then those present were led into the secret, that she kept a diary, which "that most respectable Yuzia" considers perfect, but she knows that it is worthless, she has no pretensions of being an authoress and ridicules both her Yuzia and her diary.

In the meantime "Yuzia" looked at her with loving eyes and an expression of boundless love on his face.

"Well, as to the diary," protested he—"you really must excuse me!"

They departed from Tre Fontane before sunset. Long shadows fell from the trees upon the earth. The sun became large and red. The distant waters of the reservoirs and the Albanian mountains gleamed in the pink light. When the bells at St. Paul called to evening prayers, they were halfway from the church. Soon after the first peal, came another, a third, a tenth. All churches joined their voices, until at last it seemed as if the air was merged into one grand sound, and with it shouted forth not only the city, but the suburbs, the mountains, dales, and forests.

Polanetzki glanced at the face of Marinya, lighted by the golden shimmer of the setting sun. It was calm and peaceful. She had, apparently, just finished her prayer. She smiled and asked:

"Why are you so quiet and silent?"

"Because we are all silent."

In fact, they were all silent, but for various reasons. When Polanetzki was absorbed in his thoughts, Panni Osnovski "attacked" him several times with her eyes and words. He answered rarely, one word out of ten, and her glances he heeded not, in short, he simply ignored her, slighted her. Negligent, careless answers she could forgive, but his inattention to her ardent glances seemed to her too audacious, and to avenge herself, she decided to pay him in the same coin. However, as a well-bred woman she evinced a still greater friendship for his wife. She inquired how the Polanetzki's intended to spend the following day, and being informed that they would be at the Vatican, she declared, that her husband had also cards of admission, of which they would both avail themselves.

"No you," inquired she, "know how to dress for this

occasion? In black dress and a black lace shawl. Though one looks old in such costume, yet it is indispensable."

"I know all about it," replied Panni Polanetzki. "Pan Svirski has been kind enough to give necessary advice on the matter."

"By the way, Svirski does not miss an opportunity to speak to me about you during our sittings. He feels a genuine sympathy for you."

"It's mutual," answered Panni Polanetzki.

Thus conversing they arrived home. Panni Osnovski shook hands so coldly at her departure, that Polanetski noticed it.

"What's that?" mused he—"a new method of warfare, or have I said something to displease her?"

At night he asked his wife,

"What do you think of Panni Osnovski?"

"I think that Svirski is right when speaking of her incessant prattle and her relations to her husband."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE following morning when Panni Polanetzki appeared before her husband, he scarcely recognized her. She was clad in a black dress and black lace on her head, which somber attire made her look taller, darker, thinner and older, but she pleased him with her seriousness that reminded him of the day of their wedding. Half an hour later they went away. She told him that her heart was beating, that she was trembling. Jokingly he calmed her, yet the same time grew excited himself, and when they entered the semicircle of the square before the Church of St. Peter, he felt that his pulse went crescendo, and he himself became smaller. They found Svirski on the stairs, on either side of which stood porters, dressed in magnificent costumes, designed by Michel Angelo. The dazed Marinya did not notice how soon after she found herself in a very large hall, filled with people who swarmed in every nook and corner; the center only was clear, which the porters standing in lines, kept free from the crowd, and kept a clear passage into the depth of the hall. In the crowd French and Flemish whispers were audible. All eyes were fixed on the open passage, whereat from time to time appeared figures fantastically attired, which reminded Polanetzki of the picture-galleries of Brussels and Antwerp. It seemed to him that he lived in the middle ages. At times on the scene appeared a herald in a short jacket and red cap. Through the doors flashed the crimson or violet robes of the cardinals, ostrich feathers, laces on black velvet, and earnest grave heads with white hair, or face just released from a sarcophagus. It was evident, however, that the eyes of the surging mass rested on them only for a short while, that all eagerly expected something else, something higher—superior. That moment, that occurs only once in a lifetime—not with every man, either—and

can never be forgotten. Polanetzki held Marinya's hand in his own, fearing to lose her in the crowd, and felt how she trembled with excitement; and he himself—midst this silent throng of beating hearts, historical solemnity and patriarchalism, midst that grandeur of expectancy—labored under a peculiar impression, as if he suddenly became the smallest and unworthiest of men.

Soon behind then the low, panting voice of Svirski pronounced :

“And I was looking for you all over, could scarcely find you ! It'll begin soon !”

But this “soon” was delayed for a long while. In the meantime Svirski greeted a friendly monsignor, spoke to him in low tones, then conducted Polanetzki and his wife into another chamber, furnished in red damask. This room was also crowded with people, save one corner which was shielded by guards of honor, and in the center of which, on an eminence, stood a chair, and before it a number of prelates and bishops. Here the eagerness and impatience was more striking : it was apparent that the people held their breath, that all faces had a solemn, mysterious expression. The blue brightness of the sunny day mingled with the crimson of the walls, filled the room with a wonderful light, in which the rays of the sun, penetrating through the windows, seemed redder than usual. At last an ominous whisper passed through the hall, soon growing in volume to shouts, and even yells. Through the open side-doors appeared a white figure carried by court guards. Marinya's hand nervously squeezed the palm of her husband. He responded in like manner, and his impressions melted into one sensation of some extraordinary, solemn, triumphant moment, such as crowded his brain, on the day of his wedding.

One of the cardinals began to speak, but Polanetzki heard him not, nor could he understand his words. His eyes, thoughts, his whole soul was entirely absorbed in that white figure of the Pope ; not a single feature of that noble face escaped his attention. He was struck by its extreme haggardness, thinness and emaciation, its pallor and transparency, such as can only be seen on a corpse. It bore evidence of weakness and exhaustion, gave the im-

pression of half human, half vision, just as a light that shone through a piece of alabaster, a spirit clad in a transparent material, medium between two lights, combined by human and superhuman fire, natural and unnatural,—and, thanks to a peculiar antithesis, the material seemed gauzy, transparent, and the spirit—real. Later, when the crowd approached to receive the blessing, when Polanetzki beheld the kneeling form of Marinya, when he felt that to his semi-empyrean feet one might kneel, as to a father's he was seized by such a mixture of emotions and excitement, that his eyes were clouded as though with a dense mist! Never before in his life did he feel himself such a wee little grain of sand, in which, however, a grateful little heart of a child throbbed fast and violent. They departed from the Vatican in silence. Marinya's eyes were moist with tears, and she looked as if she had just awakened from sleep. Vaskovski's hands trembled . . . Bukatzki joined them at breakfast, but, being sick himself, could not restore their gay humor. Even Svirski was silent during the sitting, repeating only from time to time:

"Yes, yes. Whoever had not seen it, can have no idea."

Toward evening the Polanetzki's went to look at the sunset from the Trinita dei Monti. The day wound up with beautiful weather. The whole city was veiled in a golden shimmer. At the slope of the hill, somewhere on the Piazza d'Espagna, dusk set in, but in those tender transparent tones of twilight were still seen the blooming lilacs, iris and white lilies, on both sides of "Condotti." In the whole scene a solemn, unbroken silence and peace reigned, as if the harbinger of night and slumber. Soon the Piazza d'Espagna sank into shadow, and the Trinita alone was still aglow with the purple of the setting sun. The Polanetzki's felt the effect of that universal rest and peace. They descended the gigantic steps of the stairs in a wonderful mood. All the impressions of the day arranged themselves in such even, quiet lines as the rays of the shining dawn.

"Do you know what I still remember from my days of childhood?" Polanetzki suddenly asked his wife—"that in our house at night we all prayed together." And he looked at her with an inquiring, searching glance.

“Oh, Stach!” replied she, in an agitated voice—“I dared not mention it to you, my darling!”

“Yes, that ‘holy service,’” pronounced he—“do you remember it?”

At that time, in Kremen, she attached little significance to her utterance, she expressed it simply like any other thought, and now, of course, she entirely forgot it.

CHAPTER XVII.

POLANETZKI lost considerably in the estimation of Panni Osnovski. Meeting him at Svirski's she treated him as coldly as etiquette allowed. Polanetzki was conscious of the change, and at times asked himself: "What does this woman want from me?" Of course he paid no attention to her, and probably had she been fifty or sixty years of age and not eight and twenty, had she not possessed violet eyes and raspberry lips, he would absolutely ignore her presence. But such is human nature; that notwithstanding he expected nothing from her, he could not refrain from contemplating what would happen were he to pay her homage, to what extent would she go, of what was she capable? Nevertheless they arranged an excursion to the catacombs of St. Calixtus, but even this excursion did not effect a change. They conversed, of course, but not frequently enough to attract attention, and this at last angered Polanetzki. The tactics of Panni Osnovski, her reserve, formed a sort of peculiar relation, presumably known only to themselves, —a secret, as it were, which no one else was permitted to penetrate. Polanetzki thought that it would all end with the finishing of her portrait.

Though the face needed but a few finishing touches, there still remained considerable detail, that made her presence in the studio of the artist imperative.

He did not understand that he was making an error, such as men make daily, who delight to hunt or trespass on strange premises.

Panni Osnovski was a coquette no doubt, with an icy heart, but she was very far from being unprincipled. He returned to the studio with the feeling that he had

sacrificed himself for Marinya, and regretted it heartily, if only because the latter would never know it; and had she known his chivalrous action he would gain no praise, being considered perfectly natural. This feeling annoyed him, and when he gazed at his wife, looked into her pure eyes, her calm, pretty and chaste face, he compared unwillingly these two women, and mused:

"Oh, Marinya is not such a woman! She would sooner be swallowed by mother earth. She can be trusted!"

During the entire sitting he returned mentally to Panni Osnovski time and again. He thought that very soon she would cease giving him her hand, but he was mistaken. On the contrary, she proved that she held, as of very little importance, either Polanetzki or his words, and was condescendingly amiable, even more so than before. Only Osnovski himself seemed insulted, and every day became colder and stiffer,—the result apparently of his conversation with his wife. In a few days these thoughts gave place to others of greater interest. Bukatzki was constantly ailing; he complained of a severe pain in the back of his head, and a funny feeling as of the disjuncting of every bone in his body. His jocularity was still keen and active at times, but soon disappeared, like the last flicker of a candle. He appeared very seldom at dinner, and finally one morning Polanetzki received a note written in a trembling hand: "My dear, I think, that to-night is the eve of my departure. If you have nothing to do, and wish to see me depart, please come to my room."

Polanetzki did not show the note to his wife, and went at once to Bukatzki. He found him in bed, and at his bedside a physician, who soon took his leave.

"You frightened me," said Polanetzki—"what's the matter with you?"

"Nothing, a wee little stroke of paralysis of the left side of the body!"

"Have fear of God!"

"Cleverly said! If I thought to fear God—now it's the best time for it. My left hand and foot are paralyzed and I cannot rise. Thus I awoke in the morning. I thought my tongue had gone the same way and began to recite: 'per me si va' . . . And as you see—it's intact. The

tongue has remained loyal, and my sole thought now is to preserve the clearness of my mind."

"Are you certain it's paralysis? Maybe it's only a temporary numbness of the body?"

"What is life? Oh, only a flash, an instant," recited Bukatzki. "I cannot move, and this is the end of it, or rather the beginning."

"It's horrible! But I do not believe it. Every man may be benumbed for a time!"

"Yes, there are unpleasant moments in life—as the fish said when the cook cleaned him with a knife before putting him into the frying-pan. I confess that, at the first moment, I was frightened. Have you ever had the sensation of feeling your hair rise and stand on end? This sensation cannot be called very pleasant. But I am already accustomed to my paralysis, and it seems to me, after three hours of torture, that I have lived whole decades with it. It's a question of habit, as the carp said, when in the frying-pan. . . . I keep on talking and chattering with a purpose. I've so little time to spare, you know. Do you know, my dearest, that I will be dead two days hence?"

"You're talking nonsense! Paralyzed men live for thirty years."

"Even forty. . . Paralysis is at first a "luxury" that some people allow themselves, but not such as myself. A strong man with a strong neck, and head, broad shoulders, thick chest, might consider paralysis a necessary rest after a gay and stormy youth, a good opportunity for meditation,—but not I. Do you remember how you poked fun at my hips? But then I was a veritable elephant in comparison with my present condition. I am a straight line, one (joking aside) that leads direct to the "infinite."

Polanetzki protested vigorously, introduced various instances or illustrations, but Bukatzki retorted:

"Stop prattling! I know that within two days paralysis of the brain will develop. Though I have spoken to no one about it yet I foresaw it all along, and therefore read a number of medical books. With the second crisis it will be all over!"

He paused for a moment and continued:

"Do you presume that I do not wish it? Think ye that I am as lonely as a chopped-off finger. I have no one. . . . here or in Warsaw, I may be attended in my sickness only by mere strangers, by hired nurses. Oh! what a cursed mean life this is, without movement, without a living soul, without a relative. When I lose my tongue, as I lost my hand and foot, every beggar may strike my face to their hearts' content, and I will not be able even to raise my voice in protest. Though at first the paralysis frightened me, yet in my body there still lives a proud soul. Remember that I told you—I have no fear of death—and I have none!"

In the eyes of Bukatzki floated a pale flame of energy and daring, hidden somewhere in the depth of his disjointed, softened soul. But Polanetzki who, after all, possessed a kind heart, put his hand in that of the patient's, and said cordially:

"Think not for a moment, Adia, that we will leave you without attendance, and do not say, that you have no one. Here am I, my wife, Svirski, Vaskovski, the Bigels. You are not a stranger to us! I will take you to Warsaw, will put you in a hospital. We will take care of you, and no one shall dare to touch you, or I'll break every bone in his body. . . . Besides, we have Sisters of Mercy—and among them Emilya Chavastovska."

Bukatzki grew pale, he became more agitated than could be expected of him, and his eyes seemed as if clouded with smoke.

"You are a good chap," said he at last. "You know not yourself what a miracle you have performed with me. You proved to me that I still want something. . . . Yes, I would like to be in Warsaw. . . . there in the midst of you all I would be delighted—etc.—etc.—in Warsaw."

"You shall be taken there. Meanwhile it will do you no harm to enter a hospital here, where you could be properly attended to and taken care of. Svirski ought to know which is the best here, and until then trust yourself to me. Allow me to issue your orders in the meantime. Agreed?"

"Do whatever you deem best," replied Bukatzki, who regained his old courage at the sight of Polanetzki, his

plans and his energy. The latter immediately dispatched a messenger to Svirski and Vaskovski. They came both in half an hour, together with an eminent physician, who examined the patient and sent him at once to a hospital. The same day Bukatzki was placed in a light, airy room."

"What pleasing soft tones!" remarked Bukatzki, looking at the walls and ceiling of the room, then he turned to Polanetzki and added.

"Well, now go to your wife, but come again to-night."

Polanetzki went away. He described to Marinya the calamity that had befallen Bukatzki, using great caution, fearing to frighten her with the unexpected news of his probable death. She begged him to take her along, if not the same evening, then the very next morning, which he promised to do. The following morning, after breakfast, they went together to the hospital. Vaskovski had been there day and night, entertaining the patient with stories of his own experience, how, when he once fell dangerously ill, he saved himself by confession and communion which brought instant relief.

"This is a well-known method, and I know what you aim at," remarked the patient with a smile. The old man became confused like one caught red-handed in his crime.

"I am willing to bet," said he, "that it will also help you!"

"Very well," replied Bukatzki with a gleam of his old energy, "I shall convince myself of its truthfulness in two days."

He was elated at the visit of Marinya; he did not expect to see her in the hospital, and even made a pretense of gently rebuking her.

"What an absurdity," said he—"is it worth your while to bother with a bony old man like myself. You will never be prudent. . . . Why? what for? you wish that I should feel grateful before my death—well—I am very, very thankful to you. . . ."

But Panni Polanetzki did not allow him to speak of death. She spoke herself of the necessity of returning to Warsaw, that this journey would soon be made. She gave some advice how to make himself comfortable, and gradually his thoughts were diverted and he soon relapsed

into a state resembling that of a helpless child, that submits to everything and everybody. The same day he was visited by Osnovski; the latter betrayed for the sufferer a good deal of sympathy and compassion. Bukatzki was not prepared for this, and was very much affected by that sudden interest. In the evening when Polanetzki came again, Bukatzki said to him, as soon as they were left alone:

"I will now tell you frankly: Never have I felt so keenly that I have made a foolish farce out of my life, that I spent it like a wretched dog. If I only had a liking for that method of life,"—added he after a pause,—
 "but this was not the case. What a stupid age is ours! A man splits himself in twain, and whatever good there is in him hides itself in some remote corner; he becomes a clown, bitter and insincere, meditating more upon the vanity of life than feeling its very essence. I have but one consolation,—death is something, that's real, though, on the other hand, there is no reason to discuss it before it comes: it's just like looking at the wine, and saying its vinegar."

"You are always torturing yourself with spinning your thoughts on a block. . . . Drop it now, if you can."

"You are right! But I cannot help reflecting, that when I was well and sound, I ridiculed life, and now, I confess, that I do not wish to die: I want to live, yes, I want to live!"

"And you shall!"

"Hardly! Though your wife persuaded me, yet now I doubt it again, and I suffer—I am worn out. But listen to what I am going to tell you. I know not whether I will have to give an account of myself, and yet I am alarmed, strangely so, as if I was afraid, and do you know why? Because I have never done anything good for my people, and I could, yes, I could! I am afraid of this thought, upon my honor, I am! Not a trifling matter—to do nothing! To eat your bread your whole life long, without earning it, and now—to die. . . . If there exists a punishment I deserve it, and that is why I suffer so intensely. Oh, Stach!"

In spite of his seemingly negligent tone, his face really

betrayed the alarm, his lips were pale, and perspiration covered his forehead.

"Be calm!" said Polanetzki, "this excitement may hurt you."

But Bukatzki continued: "Stop! do not interrupt me! I have a considerable fortune, and let it do for me what I failed to do. I leave one part of it to you, and with the rest you do the best you can,—something useful. . . . You and Bigel are practical men. Think of that . . . I have no time, . . . will you do this for me?"

"This and everything else."

"Thanks! But what funny regrets, alarms, and pricks of conscience! And yet I cannot banish the thoughts, of my guilt . . . such conditions won't do. . . . I positively ought to do something before I die. . . . Death is not a joke, I assure you . . . If she could, at least, be seen, but she is so dark! . . . I will decay, crumble and rot in the darkness. Are you a believer?"

"Yes."

"I am an infidel. I have played all kind of games, in my life. If it were not for the consciousness of my guilt, I would be calm. I had no idea that it could worry one so much. I am now in the position of a bee that robbed her own hive,—and this is a mean thing. One thing is good,—I leave a fortune behind me. True! I squandered some of it, but only on paintings, which also remain. Oh, how ardently do I wish to live but one year more."

He reflected a moment, then added:

"Now I understand, that life can be bad only when you manage it badly, but existence—is a glorious thing!"

Polanetzki went away late that night: During the following week Bukatzki hovered between life and death, the physicians being unable to predict the end. At all events they thought there would be no danger in removing him to Warsaw. Svirski and Vaskovski undertook to accomplish the task and attend the sufferer, who pined for his native city, and daily spoke of Emilyya Chavastovska. But, suddenly on the eve of his departure, he lost the power of speech. The heart of Polanetzki was rent with pain, when he looked into the eyes of the invalid, in which he read so much alarm and mute appeal.

He tried to write but could not. In the evening he received another stroke which paralyzed his brain, and he died.

He was temporarily buried at Champo-Santo. Polanetzki declared that his last glance before his death expressed the request to be taken home. Svirski confirmed this conjecture.

Thus perished that soap bubble, that at times sparkled with all the colors of a rainbow, but always weak, powerless.

Polanetzki was sincerely grieved at his death, and for hours thought of his strange life. He did not share his thoughts with Marinya, because he was not accustomed to confide to his wife what was taking place in his heart of hearts. From these reflections he deduced various ideas in his own favor.

"Bukatzki," said he to himself, "could never be in harmony with his own mind; he lacked experience, common sense; he could not collect his thoughts, and always followed the impulse of his phantasy. Had he lived—well, thanks to such a method, I would give him credit for some prudence, but as it was, it was very bad. It is indeed absurd to look at wine, and to persuade yourself that it is vinegar. I am at present fully reconciled to my life, as to everything else."

Though there was some truth in this, yet it was also a self-deception; he was not consistent with his own wife. He thought that protecting her as a husband, and treating her well, feeding her, and lavishing kisses on her, he fulfilled all obligations. In the meantime their relations were distinguished by the fact that he "allowed" her to love him and "tolerated" her love. In his every-day life he observed many strange things; when one of his friends, noted for his honesty, acted nobly in some affair, people waved their hands and carelessly remarked: "Oh, that X. . . . It's but natural;" and if the same noble action was performed by a scoundrel, the same people protested, "there surely must be something in the man." . . . A hundred times Polanetzki noticed that a penny given by a miser produces more impression than a ten-dollar gold-piece given by a generous man. But he was

not conscious that he followed the same principle in his relations toward Marinya. While she gave him her whole being, her whole soul, he shook his head and waved his hands. "Well, this Marinya! Of course, naturally!"

If her love was not so attentive, not so easily gained; if he were convinced that this treasure were given to him as a treasure, as a deity that had to be respected and esteemed, he would have accepted with humble deference. But Marinya gave him her love as his property, as a tribute due him, and he accepted it in like manner and spirit. She considered his love a happiness, and he gave her that happiness, deeming himself a deity. One ray of light of his deity he generously let fall into the heart of a woman, the rest he kept for himself. Thus, taking everything, he gave up only a part. In his love there was no timidity, the source of which is respect; his love lacked what in every tender word says, "Everything to your feet!"

But neither of them was conscious of it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"I DO not even ask if you are happy," said Bigel to Polanetzki on his return to Warsaw. "With a woman like your wife, one cannot help being happy."

"Yes, Marinya is a very good and honest woman," replied Polanetzki, "and it's impossible to expect more. We get along very nicely," added he, addressing Panni Bigel, who was present, "and it could not be otherwise."

"Do you remember our former conversations on marriage and love? When I was in fear of falling in love with a woman who would close the whole world for her husband, possess all his thoughts and sentiments, and become the only aim of his life. Do you recollect how I proved to you and Panni Chavastovska that love of a woman should not absorb the man, that there are more important things in the world to a man than mere love?"

—"Yes, I do recollect, even what I answered, for instance, 'that household occupations in no way hinder love for children.' It seems to me anyway that such things are not like empty boxes, that, if you put a few of them on the table, there is no more space left for others."

—"My wife is right," remarked Bigel. "I have seen that human beings very often err when they introduce sentiment into physical conditions, and if your conversation touches this point, it is not worth while to speak of a particular . . ."

—"Silence, silence, you enslaved man!" merrily shouted Polanetzki.

—"What of it, if the enslavement is pleasant to me. . . But your turn will also come, and very soon. . . ."

—"My turn?"

—“Yes, you will be enslaved by your honesty, kindness, heart.”

—“That is different. One may be subjugated, but not prostrated. But let me praise Marinya. I came across such a good woman that a better one is impossible to find. She is perfectly satisfied with my feelings toward her, she does not wish to be my exclusive deity, and I love her the more for that. The Creator has preserved me from a wife that would claim for herself my soul, my reason, my whole being, and I am sincerely thankful, for I could not endure such a character. One can give it all away at his own volition, but not under compulsion, or force.”

—“Believe me, Pan Polanetzki,” objected Panni Bigel, “we are all equally exacting in this respect; but at first we take a particle of that, which is given to us as a whole, and after—”

—“What is after?” ironically interrupted Polanetzki.

—“After, really honest women resolve to do what is of no importance to you, but for us it is the very basis and support in life.”

—“What kind of a talisman is it?”

—“Concession.”

—“Polanetzki burst out laughing.”

—“The late Bukatzki once said that women cover themselves with this concession as with a hat that fits them. A hat of concessions and a veil of melancholy—is it a bad attire?”

—“No, it is not a bad one. But what do you want? Perhaps it is an attire that when you wear it you get an easier access to heaven than in any other.”

—“In such case my Marinya will go straight to hell, because she will never be dressed this way. But you will soon see her, as she promised to call on you after our office hours. It is evident she is late.”

—“Probably her father prevents her coming. But you will stay here for dinner.”

—“Well, let us remain here. I agree!”

—“Some one else has promised to come. Well, I will go to make the necessary preparations.” Panni Bigel left, and Pan Polanetzki asked his host.

—“Who else is invited to dinner?”

—"A certain Zavilovski, the future correspondent of our firm."

—"Who is he?"

—"A well-known poet!"

—"There! From the Parnassus to the office desk!"

—"I don't remember who said that our society keeps our geniuses on diet. . . . I have been told that he is a very able man, but one cannot subsist on mere poetry. . . . You know that our Tishkovzki got a position in an insurance company, and Zavilovski applied for the vacant place. I was skeptical about him, but he said that by giving him the place I would simply procure bread for him. He pleased me personally, and after all he speaks three languages fluently but he has no practical knowledge of business."

—"That is nothing. In one week he will learn it; but will he stick to his position and will he work as required. . . . Mind, he is after all a poet."

—"Then we will part promptly. I accepted him only because he offered his services, and naturally I gave him preference. In three days he will begin, and meanwhile I advanced him his monthly salary, as he is in need."

—"That means he is poor?"

—"It seems so. . . . There lives in Warsaw one, old Zavilovski, a very rich man, who has a daughter. I asked our poet, whether he was a relative, and he answered: No; but he blushed, and this makes me think that he is. How strange it is: some avoid their relatives, because they are poor, others—because they are rich. There is no equilibrium anywhere, and mostly on account of whims, childish pride. Anyway he will surely please you. My wife is very well pleased with him."

—"Who pleased your wife?" asked Panni Bigel on entering.

—"Zavilovski."

—"That is because I have read his poem 'On the Threshold.' This Zavilovski looks as if he has something to hide from men."

—"He hides poverty, or rather poverty hides him."

—"No, he bears the marks of hard times."

—"Have you ever seen such a romantic lady? She thinks that he has suffered much, and she felt offended

when I told her that in all probability he had suffered in his youth from pains in the stomach. . . . This, you see, is not poetical enough for her."

Polanetzki glanced at his watch and expressed his impatience.

—"Ah what a creeping mouse Marinya is!" said he. But this mouse having just arrived, Polanetzki told her that they would stay for dinner, and she consented. Then she greeted the children who came in with considerable noise.

Soon came Zavilovski, and Bigel presented him to the Polanetzkis. He was a young man about twenty-seven years of age. Scrutinizing him Polanetzki found that he did not at all look like a man who had suffered greatly in his life. He seemed rather confused and perplexed to find himself among strangers. He had a nervous face, a pointed beard, merry gray eyes and a striking forehead, on which the veins plainly traced the letter V. He was tall and awkward.

—"I heard," said Polanetzki, "that you would begin work in our office."

—"Just so, my principal," answered Zavilovski, "I will commence my service."

—"Oh, for God's sake, drop that principaldom," laughed Polanetzki; "we are not in the habit of using titles and making a show of principaldom. But, maybe, my wife will like this as it will exalt her in her own eyes. . . . Well," said he, turning to his wife, Panni Principal, "do you desire to be called Panni Principal? This may prove a new distraction."

Zavilovski was troubled, but he laughed, when Panni Polanetzki said laughingly:

—"No, decidedly I don't want it, as it seems to me that a lady principal must wear a tremendous cap,"—she showed with her hand the size,—"and I don't like caps."

The young man became more at ease among these cheerful and kind people, but he was soon in confusion again, when Panni Polanetzki said:

—"I have read nothing for some time, as we have but lately arrived from abroad . . . What is your latest production?"

—"Nothing. . . I only write poetry in my leisure hours, as Pan Bigel practises music. . . simply for distraction."

—"I don't believe it," said Panni Polanetzki. And she was right. Indeed, he desired that they should not consider him as a poet, but merely as a correspondent or clerk of their firm. He titled Bigel and Polanetzki not so much out of modesty, but in order to show them, that since he prevailed upon himself to become a clerk, he considers this occupation just as good as any other, and that he would now and hereafter try to adapt himself to his new task with zeal. But there was something else. Though young, Zavilovski had seen how ridiculous are those who, after having written two or three poems, crave to be called poets, and imagine that they are superior beings, prophets. His self-respect suffered greatly even at the thought that he might be laughed at, and therefore he went to the other extremity and was practically ashamed of his poetry, even the least reference to his poetic propensities put him in a state of frenzy and despair.

Nevertheless he was conscious of his inconsistency: better not write poems at all and not let them be printed over his signature; but he could not resist the temptation. True, his head was not surrounded with an aureola of glory, but some rays had touched it, and they glowed or grew dim as he wrote or abandoned poetry. Being as proud as he was gifted, he prized these glimpses of glory the greatest pleasure in the world, but he did not like to be referred to as a poet. However, when he was aware that he became forgotten as such, he suffered cruelly. He was divided in his anxiety, that made him thirsty for glory, and at the same time, fear that somebody might say he was not worthy of it. Besides, he was perplexed with many other contradictions, as it often is with an impressive young man, who regards himself as something exclusive. For this reason poets generally seem artificial.

At last the dinner was served, and the topic of conversation was Italy. Polanetzki spoke of Bukatzki, how he passed the last moments of his life and made his testament that enriched the narrator by a considerable sum. The greater part of Bukatzki's estate he divided among

charitable institutions after he had consulted Bigel as prescribed in the testament. Bukatzki was loved by everybody, and he was remembered with great sympathy. Panni Bigel went so far as to shed tears, when Mariyna said that he had repented and confessed before his death, and died like a true Christian. But after all, it was a sympathy that did not prevent their dining comfortably, and if Bukatzki had sometimes dreamt of a *Nirvana*, he had now attained it, and it remained for the living, even his nearest and best friends, a light and short remembrance. A week more, a month, at the latest a year, his name will become a sound without an echo.

Zavilovski, who did not know Bukatzki, but had become interested in the story of his life, thought that if this account was true of Bukatzki, he surely would not be satisfied with the necrology, if he could hear it.

But Panni Polanetzki, wishing to give another direction to the conversation, began to tell of her excursions about Rome and its environs with Svirski and Osnovski. Bigel who knew Osnovski said:

"This man has one love—his wife, and one hatred—his fatness, or rather its disposition. In general he is a very amiable man."

"But he is very lean," retorted Panni Polanetzki.

"Two years ago he was very fat, but he began to ride a bicycle, to fence, to drink Karlsbad water, to travel in Italy and Egypt, and he became meager. But I did not mean to say that he, himself, abhors fatness. . . . His wife hates it, and he imitates her. For this reason he also used to dance to exhaustion at balls."

"Yes, that is 'sclavus saltans,' " remarked Polanetzki. "Svirski told us a good deal about it."

"Indeed," continued Bigel, "one may and must love his wife, esteem her, regard her as the pupil of his eye. . . . This is very good, but he not only loves his wife, he writes love-letters, poems; divines and augurs with closed eyes pointing his finger at the pages of a book, reading the sentence where his finger stopped, and concluding from it whether his wife loves him or not. And when he reads something that is not in touch with his thought, he grows melancholy. He is enraptured, foolishly in love, counts

her regards and tries to guess the meaning of her words. He kisses not only her hands and feet, but her gloves when no one is looking."

—"Oh, what a delightful man!" cried Marinya.

—"Would you like me to do the same?" asked Polanetzki.

Marinya reflected and said:

—"No, because it would not be natural for you to do so."

—"Oh, what a Machiavelli!" said Bigel. "This answer ought to be noted, for it expresses at the same time praise, criticism, experience, and proof that it is good as it is, but one may desire something better. There is room for everything!"

—"I accept it as praise," said Polanetzki, "though you will surely say it is a concession," added he, turning to Panni Bigel.

—"The outer part is love, but concession is the warm lining," answered Panni Bigel laughing.

Zavilovski looked with curiosity at Marinya. She seemed to him tender and sympathetic. Her answer to her husband surprised him, and he thought that only a woman, strongly in love, could speak this way. And he turned his eyes on Polanetzki with great envy.

As he had been silent, he at last resolved to take part in the conversation, but his timidity held him back, and an aching tooth made him feel miserable. But in a moment of relief he asked:

—"And Panni Osnovski?"

—"She has a husband that loves for them both, so she need not worry herself on that score," answered Polanetzki. "Svirski says so, at least. Besides, she has Japanese eyes, bears the name Anette, is adorned with a gold-filling in her upper teeth, always in view when she is laughing, so that she prefers to smile continually, and she is generally turning around and cooing like a dove."

—"Ah, what a malicious man!" cried Marinya. "On the contrary, she is lovely, lively and delightful. Svirski cannot know how much she loves her husband, as he surely did not speak with her about it. That is a mere supposition."

But his wife's remarks induced Polanetzki to think first, it is not a supposition, and next, that she is as artless as she is kind.

—"It is interesting to know," said Zavilovski, "what would have been had she loved her husband, as he is loving her?"

—"That would be the greatest egotism," answered Polanetzki, "and they would have been so much absorbed in themselves that they would not have seen anybody around them."

—"Light does not exclude warmth, on the contrary, engenders it," said Zavilovski smiling.

—"Properly speaking, this comparison is more poetical than physical," retorted Polanetzki.

"But Zavilovski's observation pleased the ladies, and they warmly sustained him, and when Bigel joined them, Polanetzki remained alone in his opinion.

The conversation turned after that to Mashko and his wife. Bigel told how Mashko undertook to conduct the big case of the annulment of the million-testament of the late Panni Ploshkovski. Distant relatives had presented their claims on the millions. Plavitski had written about it to Marinya, but she regarded it as a groundless dream, like the millions that are supposed to lie buried in Kremen. But in the hands of Mashko the case took quite another direction. Bigel was sure that the testament was not written according to all the necessary provisions and formalities, and said that Mashko would at once become a rich man if he won this case.

—"Mashko has elastic feet like a cat, and they serve him well," said Polanetzki.

—"Now, you will have to pray the Almighty to help him, as the result is highly important to your wife and her father," said Bigel. "Bear in mind that the Ploshoff estate is estimated worth seven hundred thousand roubles. Besides there is left a great sum in cash."

—"Yes, that would be a surprising and unlooked-for present," answered Polanetzki.

But Marinya was highly displeased that her father had presented his claims on the inheritance, and with the other relatives had solicited the annulment of the irregular

testament. Her husband anyhow was very rich, and her father had also quite a respectable income, so that there was no fear of want. True, she would be pleased to possess Kremen, but not under such circumstances.

—"This troubles me very much," said she warmly, "the testatrix made the best possible provisions, and it is not nice at all to frustrate the will of the dead, to take away the bread from the poor and the donations from the schools and charitable institutions. Her nephew shot himself, and, perhaps, she had been thinking of saving his soul by donations to charitable institutions. This is very bad! They ought to think and feel otherwise."

And she flushed with indignation.

—"Oh, how uncompromising you are!" said Polanetzki.

—"But, Stach, you know well that I am right," protested Marinya, "you ought to feel it! Isn't it, Stach? Am I not right?"

—"No doubt . . . but Mashko may win the case."

—"I heartily wish he would lose it!"

—"You are too uncompromising, indeed," repeated Polanetzki.

"But what a noble nature," thought Zavilovski.

After dinner Bigel and Polanetzki went to the office to smoke their cigars and talk over the distribution of Bukatzki's inheritance. As Zavilovski did not smoke, he stayed with the ladies, and Panni Polanetzki, in order to encourage him in his new occupation, said:

—"I, as well as Panni Bigel, desire that we all should consider ourselves as members of one family, and therefore ask you to count us among your nearest and best acquaintances."

—"With the greatest pleasure, if you will permit it," answered Zavilovski. "I must anyhow pay you my respect. . . ."

—"All the clerks of the firm were presented to me on the day of my marriage, but soon we went traveling. Now we will endeavor to make our acquaintance much closer. My husband expressed his wish that all should call one Sunday at Bigel's, the next at our house. This is very good, but on one condition."

—"Which one?" asked Panni Bigel.

—"That not a word about commercial affairs should be mentioned. . . . We will have music, arranged, of course, by Pan Bigel, and sometimes we will read a little, for instance, 'On the Threshold.'"

—"But not in my presence," interrupted Zavilovski, with a constrained smile.

She looked at him with her usual simplicity.

—"Why?" asked she, "the reading will be among friends. We have many times spoken of you before our personal acquaintance, and now we are friends."

Zavilovski felt better, and thought that he had met very exemplary men and that Panni Polanetzki was, at any rate, quite an exceptional woman. His fears of appearing ridiculous with his poetry, long neck and awkward figure diminished little by little, and he breathed more freely. Her face, her appearance delighted him as it did Svirski in Venice, and his practical feelings were aroused.

She began to question him about his relatives and friends. But, happily for him, the return of Bigel and Polanetzki put an end to this ordeal, for his father, a well-known gambler, went crazy, and was in a lunatic asylum.

The time was now spent in music, and Bigel took his violoncello and began to play.

Zavilovski went away delighted with his "principals," their simplicity, even Bigel's music, but especially with Panni Polanetzki, who had not the slightest notion that she had inspired within him a desire to write a new poem.

CHAPTER XIX.

MASHKO and his wife paid a visit to the Polanetzki's a week after their arrival in Warsaw. Both looked quite happy, full of life. In her gray dress that fitted her perfectly, Panni Mashko, *née* Kraslovska, five years older than Marinya, seemed younger and more attractive than in her girlhood.

Marinya asked her where they had passed their honeymoon, and she answered: "On my husband's estate," with such a tone as if this estate had been in his family for twenty generations; and she added that next year they would go abroad, as her husband had to wind up his affairs, and meanwhile they would pass the summer season on the "husband's estate."

—"Do you like the country?" asked Panni Polanetzki.

—"No, but mamma likes it."

—"Was your mother pleased with Kremen?"

—"Yes. But the windows in the house are just as in an orangery, . . . so many small panes!"

—"This is necessary," answered Panni Polanetzki, with a laugh, "because when broken small panes can be replaced from Kremen, while large panes must be sent from Warsaw."

—"My husband says he will build a new house."

Panni Polanetzki sighed quietly and began to chat about their acquaintances.

Polanetzki and Mashko went into another room and talked of Panni Ploshkovski's will.

—"Now I can positively assert," said Mashko, "that I have crawled out. I have been hanging over an abyss, but this case has given me a firm footing. Such cases are extremely rare. It is a matter of millions. Ploshkovski

was richer than his aunt, and before he shot himself, he had left all his property to the mother of Panni Kromitzki, and when she did not accept it, all this wealth was transferred to Panni Ploshkovski. Now you can understand what a treasure the grandmother has left."

—"But Bigel speaks of seven hundred thousand."

—"Tell him that if he likes to count, he will have to do it thrice. I must give myself credit. I am sharp, and can extricate myself. But do you know to whom I owe it? To your father-in-law. He told me long ago about it, but I did not take it into consideration until I got into the position already described in my letter to you. In a word, the sword of Damocles was suspended over my head. Three weeks after my letter to you I met Plavitski, who told me many improbable stories about Panni Ploshkovski. The idea struck me then to take the case. Anyhow, I will lose nothing, I thought. I went to the notary Vishinski to examine the testament, and found a few irregularities. A week later I got the power of attorney from the heirs and commenced action. And just think of it! As soon as my creditors learned of the amount involved in the case and of my fees, they stopped annoying me, and now I am pretty well off."

—"But tell me sincerely, is it a noble case?"

—"What do you mean by that?"

—"Well, I mean to say, would it not be necessary to push the case against one's honor and conscience?"

—"You see, my dear friend, in every case we can find something proper and good arguments, and our profession is based on such pleadings. The whole question is, whether the will was drawn legally, and who is entitled to be the heir. The laws have not been enacted by me."

—"Do you expect to win!"

—"In cases like this one there is always hope of winning, because the attack is made a hundred times stronger than the defence. Who will fight me in the courts? The institutions who are only officially interested in the matter. Of course, they will engage a lawyer, but how much can they offer him for his services? The fees prescribed by law. But this very lawyer can get more from me, if I am the winner, and all this will depend on a cer-

tain agreement with him. . . . In general, I can tell you that in courts, as in life, those win who make efforts to win."

—"But, mind, if you succeed, the public opinion will fall upon you heavily. . . . My wife is partly against you, too."

—"How is it 'partly'?" interrupted Mashko, "but I will become your benefactor."

—"All right, but nevertheless, my wife is against you and your winning the case."

—"Well, she is an exception."

—"Hardly; I cannot say that I am pleased with it."

—"By Jove, it seems to me that you have been transformed from a practical man to a romantic one!"

—"Stop this idle talk, you know well that I am not a dreamer."

—"All right. Then let us talk about the public opinion. First, the unpopularity of a man who is *comme il faut* is rather useful than prejudicial. Besides, one must know how to arrange it. I will be wrecked, indeed, if I lose the case; but it will be just the contrary if I win. I will be simply considered a smart man. . . . But the matter takes a different shape from a purely economical point of view. The money will anyhow remain in the country, and will not be used any worse than if the will of the testatrix had been carried out. Let us see: when the specified sums will be used to educate a few poor children, to buy a few machines for seamstresses, or to build an asylum for aged men and women to enable them to live a year or two more—what will the country gain by it? This is not a productive investment. It is time to learn economy. . . . But after all, how could I act otherwise when a sword was suspended over my head? And had I not to provide first for myself, my wife and my posterity? If ever you get in such a position as I was in, you will understand me. I preferred to reach the shore than to be drowned, and everybody has a right to save himself. My wife has a small income, and must send a part of it to her father, as he has threatened to come to us if we do not help him, and I don't want him."

—"Then you know now where Kraslovska is."

—"Yes, and therefore I don't conceal anything from you. I am aware of the fact that wild stories are told about my wife and mother-in-law, and for this reason I prefer to tell you how the matter stands. Kraslovski is now living in Bordeaux; he was an agent for a sardine firm and used to make considerable money, but he lost his position on account of drunkenness, and, besides, he had provided himself with an illegal family. . . . My ladies are sending him three thousand francs yearly; but this is not enough for him, and he is bombarding the poor women with letters in which he threatens to publish them in the paper, that they let him die in misery. Soon after my marriage he asked me to increase his allowance by a thousand francs. Now he is proving to me that women have ruined him, and advises me to be careful in this respect. . . ."

And Mashko burst out laughing.

—"But this beast has also aristocratic ways," continued Mashko. "Once want obliged him to sell programmes in theaters, but when he was ordered to wear a uniform-hat, he flatly refused to comply, declaring that he would rather die of hunger. Now you will understand, why I preferred to send him a thousand francs than to see him here. But what hurts my feelings most, is the talk that in this country he was merely a clerk. It is a base calumny, as one can convince himself by looking at the first book of genealogy. The family Kraslovski is well known, and my father-in-law has here many relatives."

But the genealogy of the Kraslovskis did not at all interest Polanetzki, and they began to talk about the ladies. At this moment Zavilovski made his appearance. Polanetzki presented Mashko, and invited him to tea in order to show him the photographs they brought from Italy. There were a number of them on the tables, and Zavilovski took up one in a small frame. It was the portrait of Lida. Zavilovski looked at it with delight and said to Panni Polanetzki:

—"It seems to be more the phantasy of an artist than the portrait of a child. What a wonderful and attractive expression! Is it not your sister?"

—"No," answered Panni Polanetzki, "the child died."

Zavilovski looked again at the portrait, but with a feeling of pain. His poetic imagination caught the tragic moment of death.

—"I asked you, if she was your sister, as she looks like you. . . You have something in common in the features and especially in the eyes."

But Polanetzki was filled with such a holy veneration for the dead girl that, though the comparison of Zavilovski implied a recognition of Marinya's beauty, he considered it as profanation, and taking the portrait from his hands, he put it on the table and said sharply:

—"Not at all, there is absolutely no likeness! Nor can there be any comparison!"

This exclamation vexed Panni Polanetzki, and she said:

—"And I am of the same opinion."

But Zavilovski turned to Panni Mashko and asked:

—"Did you know Lida?"

—"Yes."

—"Did you see her at Bigel's?" asked Panni Polanetzki.

—"Yes."

—"But she does not resemble me?"

—"No."

Zavilovski, who sincerely esteemed and admired Panni Polanetzki, cast a look of surprise on her husband, who was closely contemplating the tall figure of Panni Mashko thinking: "How finely shaped she is!"

The Mashkos soon took their leave. Kissing Panni Polanetzki's hand, Pan Mashko said:

—"Maybe I will have to go to St. Petersburg, and I pray you to take care of my wife."

When tea was served Panni Polanetzki reminded Zavilovski of his promise to recite his poem, "On the Threshold," and he now felt so much at ease that he not only read this poem, but another, written sometime before. He was astonished at his boldness and willingness to recite. He accepted with pleasure the sincere praises of Panni Polanetzki, and said:

—"I must confess that I feel in your house as if our acquaintance had existed for years."

Polanetzki remembered that he himself once made the same remark to Marinya while he was staying at Kremen; but now he accepted the compliment as partly due to him, though Zavilovski meant it only for his wife, who greatly delighted him by her simplicity, kindness and appearance.

When Zavilovski left, Polanetzki said to his wife:

—"This fellow is indeed very able."

Polanetzki began to put the photographs in some order. and taking Lida's portrait, he said:

—"I will put this in my cabinet."

—"But you have one there."

—"Yes; but I don't want this one here, where everyone can see it and make remarks, that drive me mad.

Will you permit it?"

—"Yes, Stach," answered his wife.

CHAPTER XX.

BIGEL tried hard to persuade Polanetzki to take an active part in the business of the firm and not to launch carelessly into new enterprises.

—"We have created," said he, "a respectable commercial firm, and therefore we are useful to others."

He tried to prove that simply in justice to their business they ought to continue it, especially as they had increased their capital twofold. Polanetzki agreed with him, but at the same time insisted that the framework of their firm was too narrow for him, that he aimed at larger enterprises. But he nevertheless was afraid to start a factory at his own risk, and he became more and more inclined to possess real estate.

This peculiar desire possessed him more and more. He did not want the unnatural, he wanted to own his corner wherein he would feel himself at home—the sole lord and master. He explained this desire to Bigel and called it an inborn passion, which might be tamed and controlled, but which would after all in his old days assert itself with new force. Bigel agreed with his views and replied:

"You are right. Being married, you naturally desire to own your home, and as you possess the necessary capital, build yourself a warm and comfortable nest."

In view of this Polanetzki intended to erect a large house, which would yield a certain profit and at the same time would appease his desire to be the owner of real estate. He soon observed, however, that this practical decision has one bad feature: Such property is seldom attractive: one can call it "his own," but he cannot love it: how can he love cold stone walls, which any one paying rent can claim possession of? At first he was ashamed of this thought: it seemed to him romantic. He felt that

the sight of the trees, growing in the garden before his house, would give him genuine pleasure. At the end he reached the conclusion that it were best to acquire title to a little house near the city, something like the villa of Bigel, where crows build their nests on old trees.

"As long as I possess the means—" said he to himself, "this idea is not only romantic but practical." But he understood very well that where it concerned the choice of a nest in which he intended to spend the remainder of his life, haste was folly, and he did not busy with the execution of his plan.

His wife, seeing that he was absorbed in something unusual, attempted to find out the cause, but his replies invariably were the same: "When the result is known, I will tell you all about it myself. Until then I know absolutely nothing, and don't care to waste breath. This is not in my character."

She was, however, enlightened by Panni Bigel, with whom her husband shared his thoughts. Naturally Marinya felt hurt by the disparaging distinction, especially when the choice of a home was the subject, but her "Stach was of another character," and she was loath to annoy him with questions he did not care to answer. Polanetzki's neglect was not intentional, it simply never occurred to him to take his wife into his confidence in financial matters. His conversation with her was limited to matters pertaining to her own horizon of action; among others, to the group of acquaintances she wished to form. Before his wedding Polanetzki had been almost a recluse. But now he felt that life without society held out no bright prospects. They returned the visit of Mashko, and discussed the advisability of calling on the Osnovskas who had returned from abroad with the intention of remaining in Warsaw till the middle of June. Marinya insisted that they must, for they will often meet the Osnovskas in Warsaw. Polanetzki set his heart against it. A few days after the Osnovskis met Marinya. The greeting was very cordial, and as they bluntly expressed the hope of being on friendly terms, Polanetzki's opposition was defeated. On their first visit to the Osnovskis, Polanetzki once more observed that

all courtesies were cheerfully paid to his wife, as to himself he was accorded a polite but cold reception. His wife came first, he second, and it angered him. Pan Osnovski if anything, looked to be more enamored of his wife than ever. It was evident that his heart beat faster when she was near him. And when he spoke to her, it was with caution and fear, lest he should perchance, annoy her with a word. Polanetzki looked at him with compassion. In his fight with obesity Osnovski came out victorious. His former raiment looked too loose and broad and the red spots that had covered his face disappeared entirely; he grew paler and handsomer. At the Osnovskis the Polanetzkis formed a new acquaintance in the person of Panni Bronich and her niece, a young girl, Castelli, who came to see the sights of the "summer carnival." They took up their abode in the villa Pan Bronich, her late husband, sold to Osnovski with the condition that his widow should have the use of one of its pavilions during the rest of her life. Panni Bronich was nicknamed in Warsaw, "the sweet one" for her conversation was honey-like, especially when she spoke to people she was interested in; on such occasions it seemed as if she had a lump of sugar in her mouth. Wonderful stories were afloat of her knack for crippling the truth. Mademoiselle Castelli was the daughter of her sister, who had, to the great chagrin of her parents, married an Italian music teacher. She died soon after her marriage, leaving a little baby girl. It took a year for Castelli to make up his mind to drown himself, and Panni Bronich undertook the bringing up and educating of his daughter. Linetti was a very comely girl, with blue eyes, blond hair, a pretty, almost white, face. Her eyelashes were heavy which gave her a sleepy air, and perhaps an air of thoughtfulness. One could imagine, that this charming creature lived an inner life, and therefore was indifferent to her surroundings. If any one was stupid enough not to guess it, Panni Bronich immediately came to their assistance. Panni Osnovski who was enthusiastic over her cousin, said of Linetti's eyes, that they were deep as a lake. The question remained an open one, what was at the bottom of that lake? and this mysteriousness added to her charms.

The Osnovskis came to Warsaw with the intention of spending but a short time as guests, but "Anette," had not been in Rome in vain. "Art and art, and nothing else for me," said she to Panni Polanetzki. Her intention was apparently to establish an Athenian Salon, and her secret desire to be the Beatrice of some Dante, the Laura of a Petrarch or at least a Vittoria Colonna for some Michel Angelo." "We have a lovely garden in our villa," said she, "the nights will be beautiful, and we will gather there for Roman-Florentine chats. Twilight, the moon, a few lamps, the shadow of the trees. We will sit and discuss in semitones everything: life, sentiments, art. At all hazards it is better than gossiping.

"You, Yuzia," turning to her husband, "will feel bored, but do not be angry with me. Believe me it will all be so exquisite, so unique."

"Oh, Anette! How can I be bored by anything that amuses you! Especially now when Linetti is with us! She is an artiste in the full sense of the word."

And she addressed Linetti, "Well, what grand thoughts occupy your pretty head? What is your opinion of Roman evenings?"

Linetti smiled sleepily, and her "sweet" aunt said to Polanetzki:

"You don't know yet that the dear child was blessed by Victor Hugo, when she was very young."

"Oh, so!—Were you acquainted with Victor Hugo?" asked Panni Polanetzki.

"We? No! And I would not wish to be acquainted with the man for anything in the world. But once we rode through the 'Passe' when he was on the balcony, and I really don't know what inspired him, but he raised his hand and blessed Linetti, and blessed her as soon as he saw her. . . ."

"Auntie!" interrupted Linetti.

"Yes, but this is true, my child. And the truth—the truth cannot be silenced. . . . I told her then . . . look, my child, he lifts his hand . . . and Consul Cardin who sat on the front seat saw him raise his hand and then bless her. I repeat this story, because I believe that God forgave him his many sins, thanks to his blessing. His

mind, they said, was such an evil one. . . . Nevertheless, he blessed Linetti."

There was just a grain of truth in the story: they had really seen Victor Hugo on a balcony, but gossip had it that he raised his hand to close his mouth: he was yawning. In the meantime Panni Osnovski continued on her old theme. "We will reproduce here a little 'Italy'; and if our effort is not successful, we will make a trip to the real great Italy, in winter. It has been an old dream of mine to furnish a house in Rome, but in the meantime Yuzia brought from there a few excellent copies of pictures and sculptures. He did it for my sake. Pan Svirski helped him to make a fine selection. What a pity Svirski is not here, and poor Bukatzki. He would have been invaluable now. He was a very amiable fellow. His mind was flexible as a snake. He added much life to conversation."

She turned to Panni Polanetzki.

"You probably are not aware that you made a conquest of Svirski. After your departure he spoke of no one but you. He even began to paint a Madonna, who possessed all your features, and you became a Fornarina. Evidently, you are lucky with artists, and when our Florentine nights begin, I and Linetti will have to take care or else we shall be pressed to the wall."

"If it's a question of faces that impress artists," interposed Panni Bronich, casting displeasing glances at Marinya, "I will relate to you what happened once in Nice."

"Auntie!" interrupted her niece.

"But, truth is truth, my child. . . . A year ago, no, two years. . . . How time is flying. . . ."

But Panni Osnovski, who had heard that story more than once, again addressed Panni Polanetzki.

"Have you many friends in the world of artists?"

"My husband probably has. I have none. I only know one—Zavilovski."

At the mention of this name, Panni Osnovski became enthusiastic. She had long desired to make his acquaintance. "Let Yuzia himself say, if she did not." She recently read a poem of his with Linetti named "Ex imo,"

and Linetti who possessed an aptitude for characterizing things with one single word, said. . . . "What did she say?" "That there is something harmonious, metallic," confirmed auntie.

"That's right, metallic's the word. I always fancied Zavilovski something molded. . . . How *does* he look?"

"Of low stature," said Polanetzki, "stout, over fifty years old, and not a hair on his bald head."

"The faces of Osnovski and Linetti grew elongated. Disappointment was fairly written on their features. Marinya laughed and reassured them.

"Do not believe him," said she, "he is a bad man and loves to joke. Zavilovski is young, somewhat coy and wild and resembles Wagner."

"This means that his head is long—the head of a Polechivelle," remarked Polanetzki.

But Osnovska paid no further attention to Polanetzki's witticisms, but asked Marinya to acquaint her with Zavilovski as soon as possible.

"We will try," said she, "to make him feel good and comfortable in our midst, that he should cease to be wild. But, after all, this is not important. He ought to be wild at the approach of people—like an eagle in a cage. But he will make up with Linetti, but she is also wrapt up in herself, is mysterious like a spirit."

"It seems to me that every extraordinary man," began the "sweet" aunt.

But the Polanetzki's began to bid farewell, and soon after departed. In the ante-chamber they came upon Kopovski, who had his shoes shined by the valet, while he combed his hair, his head looking as though chiseled from marble. On the street, Polanetzki observed to his wife—"That chap will be handy at the Florentine nights. He is also a sphinx!"

"If he would only stand motionless in a niche!" replied Marinya. "However, they are nice women, these ladies."

"How peculiar!" continued Polanetzki. "Panni Osnovski is rather good looking, and still I prefer the homely Panni Mashko. As to Panna Castelli, she is, indeed, very pretty, though a little too tall. Did you notice that she

is constantly spoken of while she herself never utters a word!"

"She is considered very intelligent, but she's as timid as Zavilovski. We will have to introduce them to each other."

But one accident prevented this plan from being realized. The following day after the visit, Marinya stumbled on the stairs and sprained her knee so badly that she was laid up for several days. Polanetzki grew alarmed, but when the physician reassured him that there was no danger, he grumbled: "You must remember that your health is precious not to yourself alone."

She suffered both from her fall and from the slight which she thought his words contained. For several days he neglected his office duties attending to her needs. Before breakfast he read aloud to her, after breakfast he worked in an adjoining room with the doors open. Seeing his care and sympathy, she thanked him. He kissed her brow and said: "It's my duty. Even strangers come here to inquire about your health. Her friends were, indeed, lavish in their visits. Zavilovski came, Panni Bigel came in the morning, Pan Bigel in the evening."

The latter invariably sat at the piano and entertained her with music. The Mashkos and Panni Bronich came twice, and left their cards. Panni Osnovski, leaving her husband in the carriage, forced her way into the room of the patient and chattered with her for two long hours; she spoke of her husband, of Svirski, of Linetti and Zavilovski, who occupied her thoughts day and night. At last she declared to Marinya that they must address each other in the intimate "thou" and invited her to assist her in one venture, that now filled her brain.

"Zavilovski cannot be banished from my mind, even Yuzia began to envy him. But Yuzia is so unreasonable in many things. I am sure that they will make a nice couple,—he and Linetti. They are created for each other . . . not Yuzia and Linetti I mean, but Zavilovski. One is a poet, the other is a poetess. Do not laugh, and do not think that I am joking. You don't know Linetti. She needs an extraordinary man. She would never marry a Kopovski, for instance, although, he resembles a

cherub. I never saw in my life such another face as Kopovski's, and do you know what Linetti says of him: *c'est un imbécile!* May be she has her eyes for him. I mean Zavilovski, and it would be a brilliant idea, to have these two come together, fall in love, and marry. What a lovely pair these two would make. I imagine how they would love each other! If only to witness that, it would be worth our while to arrange this match.

"I believe, however, that our plan will be successful. Auntie Bronich is uneasy . . . she is looking diligently for a husband for Linetti . . . But, pardon me, if my prattle annoys you . . . but I do love to chat, especially on the eve of some great undertaking."

Panni Polanetzki felt a strange weariness after her visitor left, and when her husband came in she laughed at Osnovski's enthusiasm.

"She has, however, a kind heart, and I like her, as an exulted woman! And what does not flash through her empty head!"

"She is 'affected' rather than 'exulted'" replied Polanetzki, "and there is a vast difference. Exultation goes hand-in-hand with kindness of heart, while affectation is allied to dryness, and is often the result of the fact, that the head is active and talking, while the heart is dormant."

—"You don't like Panni Osnovski."

It was true. He gazed at his wife, and her beauty dazzled his eye: her hair fell in tresses upon the pillow and her little face peeped out from that dark wave, like a flower; the eyes seemed bluer still, and through the half open lips a row of fine white teeth was visible.

"How beautiful you are to-day!" said he, bending down and kissing her eyes and lips.

But every kiss shook her whole being and caused her pain. It was disagreeable to her, that he appeared to have noticed her beauty by accident, that his face changed, grew pale at these kisses, and she turned away her head.

"Ah, Stach!" pleaded she, "do not kiss me so . . . so violently . . . You know that I am sick."

"Yes, true, forgive me," said he with concealed anger. And he went out of the room to examine a plan of a house sent to him for approval.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN a week Panni Polanetzki was well again, and husband and wife went to the Bigels, who had removed to their summer villa. Zavilovski was a frequent visitor, and, a general favorite. At dinner he was told of the Osnovskis, of their intentions to arrange Athaeno-Roman-Florentine nights, of Castelli and the interest which he aroused in the ladies.

"I am glad you told me that. I will not be tempted there by anything in the world."

"First you will make their acquaintance in our house," said Marinya.

"Never!" exclaimed he, "I will run away!"

"Why? You must be confident and certain not only in your convictions but also in your productions."

"Of course"—insisted Panni Bigel—"why be ashamed, or confused? You must look boldly into people's eyes and tell them! 'I write, because I write!'"

"I write, because I write!" echoed Zavilovski laughingly.

"You will be introduced to them in our house," continued Marinya; "then you will leave at their house your card, and later on some nice evening we will take you along with us."

"I am sorry that I cannot hide my head in the snow, because there is none now," replied Zavilovski, "but I will find a convenient spot."

"And if I should ask you very, very much!"

"Then I will go!" replied he, blushing and looking at her pale face.

In the evening the Polanetzkis promised to take him in their carriage back to town. Meanwhile Marinya said

to him: "Now we must use some gentle force, you have not seen Linetti Castelli, but as soon as you see her, you will surely fall in love with her."

"I?" exclaimed he, putting his hand on his breast.—
"I will fall in love with Castelli?"

There was so much sincerity in his exclamation, that he grew confused but Panni Polanetzki was also discomfited. On their return home, Polanetzki sat silent beside her in the carriage, smoking a cigar."

"What are you thinking of?" asked she.

"Of things, I discussed with Bigel," said he calmly, shaking the ashes from his cigar.

Zavilovski thought that had she been his wife, he would not think of smoking cigars, but would kneel at her feet and pray to her.

And little by little, under the influence of the night and the presence of a woman, he became exalted. After a while he began to recite to himself, then louder, his poem, "Snow in the Mountains." It expressed a longing for something inaccessible, pure, spotless. He was carried away by his enthusiasm and did not notice when the carriage reached the city. The horses halted at the house of Polanetzki, and Marinya said in parting:

"And so, to-morrow, for the 'five o'clock'!"

"Yes," replied Zavilovski kissing her hand.

Panni Polanetzki was still under the influence of the ride in the night, the moon, and perhaps the poem. Since their return from Rome they both prayed together at night before retiring. After the prayer she was filled with a holy joy, wrought by outside impressions.

Approaching her husband, she embraced his neck and passionately whispered:

"Stach, ought our life be thus? ought we not to make it better?"

He pressed her to his breast, and replied with careless pride:

"Am I complaining?"

It never entered his mind, that in this question of his wife's there was hidden a pity and apprehension which she did not permit to poison her soul, but wanted him to disperse.

The next day the Osnovskis', Panni Bronich and Castelli arrived exactly at five o'clock. Zavilovski, to avoid coming in when they were all assembled, was on hand much earlier. He was exceedingly shy and somewhat clumsy, but both these defects possessed a certain charm which Panni Osnovski recognized and appreciated. The first act of the comedy began in which the ladies played a most active part. It confused him, and he tried to hide his confusion in an air of artificial freedom. Linetti alone looked indifferent.

She was surprised that at that moment she was not the sun and he the moon, but just the opposite. The first impression produced on her by Zavilovski was expressed in the thought, "no comparison with Kopovski," and the face of that "imbécile" appeared so vivid to her, that her eyes became more sleepy than ever, and her features reminded one of a China sphinx. She cast shy glances at him. Zavilovski spoke to Panni Polanetzki, the only lady present with whom he was well acquainted. Panni Osnovski in the meantime prattled along about her preference for the city as compared with the village.

"But I will say candidly," continued she—"I do not love household duties, and accounts, and for that I was often scolded. Besides I am somewhat lazy. But, what should I like to do? First, to herd geese."

Zavilovski laughed. She appeared to him very natural. He imagined Panni Osnovski herding geese. Her violet eyes were also laughing, and she soon assumed the air of a free and gay maiden, who speaks her mind freely.

"And would you love to do it?" suddenly asked she.

"At times," replied Zavilovski.

"Oh, you see! Then, what else? Oh, I would like to be a fisherman. In the morning, the stars gaze into the blue water. Then to hang the nets before the thatched cabin, it must be so pretty; or, if not a fisherman, then a water-bird, or a sea-gull, flying over meadows. Now, the sea-gull is a sad bird that reminds one of mourning."

Then she turned to Castelli.

"Ah you! Linetti, what would you like to be in the village?"

"A cobweb," replied Linetti, lifting her eyebrows.

The imagination of Zavilovski, as a poet, pictured for him a village scene; before his eyes lay a vast expanse of fields of yellow, ripe corn, and over them hung silvery threads of cobwebs, calmly dangling in the blue ether of the air and the sun.

"Ah, that's a beautiful picture!" exclaimed he.

And he looked attentively at Linetti. She smiled at him gratefully, for his conception of the beauty of the picture. At that moment the Bigels arrived. Panni Bronich purposely barricaded Zavilovski, so he could not stir. It was easy to guess who was the subject of their conversation. Zavilovski cast shy glances at Linetti from time to time, as if to convince himself that she was the individual that was being discussed, though the conversation was held in semi-whispers. The guests soon heard the "sweet" words of Panni Bronich, as though they were filtered through a lump of sugar:

"And do you know that Napoleon,—that is, Victor Hugo, blessed her?"

Zavilovski had heard so many wonderful things about Castelli, that he looked at her with great curiosity. According to Panni Bronich's stories, Linetti was a wonderful child. At ten, she was very sickly. The physicians ordered a change of climate,—sea-air—and they spent considerable time in Stromboli.

"The child looked at the volcano, clapped her hands, and exultingly cried: 'Oh, how nice!' Accidentally we came there in a hired yacht, just for a sail, without any other purpose. We could not remain there. It was a small desert island, with no place to live in, no food, but she would not hear of leaving it, as though feeling that she would recover there. She did, indeed, and as you see, she grew up stately and strong."

Zavilovski looked at her again with increasing interest. Before the departure of the guests, he was finally released from his captivity, and he approached Linetti and said: "I never saw a volcano, have no idea what they look like, and do not know what impression they make."

"All I know is Vesuvius," replied Castelli, "and when we saw it there was no eruption."

"And Stromboli?"

"I don't know. I have not seen it."

"Then I must have heard wrong, because your aunt"——

"Yes, no—that is, I don't remember. I must have been so young at that time."

And the young girl was confused. However, she was displeased with her aunt for constantly lying. At the parting, Panni Castelli pressed his hand with such force that it confirmed the conviction that they must understand each other. The Bigels remained for dinner, and Zavilovski was also persuaded to remain. The departed guests soon became the topic of their conversation.

"Well, how do you like Panni Castelli?" asked Panni Polanetzki.

"She is rich in imagination, if nothing else," replied Zavilovski. "Did you notice that they speak figuratively? But Linetti is a very interesting girl, isn't she?"

Polanetzki, on whom Castelli made no impression whatever, being hungry said impatiently:

"Oh, this is too much! She'll be interesting, till she gets spoiled."

"No, Linetti will never be spoiled," protested Panni Polanetzki. "Only average women are spoiled; women who know no more than to love."

Zavilovski looked at her. He noticed a ring of sadness in her words.

"You are tired?" asked he.

"Yes, a little," replied she, with a faint smile.

His young heart beat with warm sympathy. "She is a real lily," thought he, and Panni Osnovski in comparison with her seemed to him a noisy crow, and Castelli a dead sphinx.

Meeting him the next morning in the office, Polanetzki inquired:

"Well, did you dream of the sleeping princess?"

"No," muttered Zavilovski, blushing.

Polanetzki noticed his blush, laughed and said:

"You can't help it, my boy. You must go through all these obstacles. I passed through mine."

CHAPTER XXII.

MARINYA, even to herself, never complained of her husband. There had never been a grave difference between them. She was merely conscious that true happiness and love must be such as she imagined them to be. But when Polanetzki was only her betrothed she had different ideas upon the matter. Of this she convinced herself more and more every day. Of course, she reasoned that he was a man, that, besides her he had a whole world of labor and thought; as the days passed she had hoped that he would take her hand and lead her into that world, or at least share with her his thoughts and labor. The reality proved worse than she imagined. Polanetzki, as he often declared himself, took her and owned her, and therefore when their mutual feelings became merely mutual obligations he deemed it unnecessary to occupy himself with her more than the everyday life demanded. He was not romantic. He evinced the care of a husband, and not of a lover; he was not permeated with a feeling of tenderness.

When, after the sale of Kremen, Marinya became indifferent to his advances, he suffered keenly; but when after the death of Lida, Marinya became his property, he began to think of her as a piece of property. All his feelings, based on physical beauty, received their reward, and were satisfied, and only time could dull and dampen them. She thought that the more she became his, the more she could expect and receive. She could not help noticing that Svirski, Bigel, Osnovski and Zavidovski looked at her not only with evident interest, but even with enthusiasm, and only her "Stach" alone was indifferent to her charms. What was the reason? This question tormented

her day and night. That Polanetzki pretended to be more sedate and sober than he really was—was not a sufficient explanation; there remained, unfortunately but one answer: “He does not love me, as a man should love, that is why he does not appreciate me as others do.”

Womanly instinct, that never deceives, told Marinya that she produced a tremendous impression upon Zavilovski, that it grew in intensity with every incoming day. The thought of this did not shock her, did not provoke the question: “how dare he?” because he ventured not, risked nothing. On the contrary, he encouraged her, strengthened her faith in her own beauty, which faith she began to lose; and this encouragement, this sympathy, was the more painful because it was not her “Stach” who performed this kind office. It was not in her nature to take delight in others’ misery, and not wishing to allow his feelings to lead him too far, she eagerly joined Panni Osnovski in her plan to arrange a match between Zavilovski and Castelli.

One afternoon she was sitting alone as usual, lost in a tangle of thoughts and questions. Suddenly the door opened and on the threshold appeared the white hood and gray dress of a Sister of Mercy.

“Emilya!” exclaimed Marinya joyfully.

“Yes ’tis I,” replied the Sister. “We are free to-day, and I came to look you up. Where is Stanislav?”

“Stanislav is at Mashko’s, but I believe he will soon be back. Sit down, take a rest!”

Panni Chavastovska sat down.

“I would visit you more frequently,” said she, “but I have no time. To-day I am free. . . . I have been to Lida. . . . Ah, if you knew how green and fragrant it is there now, and what a multitude of birds!”

“Yes, we also were there a few days ago. Everything is in full bloom, and so quiet and so calm! what a pity Stach is not home!”

“Yes, I am very, very sorry! He still has a few letters from Lida, and I wished to ask him to lend them to me for a few days. I will be here again next week and bring them back.”

Panni Chavastovska spoke calmly of Lida, perhaps

because she herself was now but the shadow of a living creature, which soon must vanish. Her thoughts were no longer absorbed in the calamity that had befallen her, and the previous indifference to everything was gone. As a Sister of Mercy she came again in contact with people, she could feel and share their joys and sorrows, even their petty surprises and disappointments.

"How nice you have it here," said she after a pause. "After our white convent walls everything here seems so rich! In former times Polanetzki was so lazy: he visited only myself and the Bigels. Now, I presume, he is different, and you receive a good deal."

"No. We only have on our list Mashko, Bronich and the Osnovskis."

"Ah! I know Panni Osnovski. I knew her when she was a girl. I knew both the Bronichis and their niece: then she was a little tot. Pan Bronich died two years ago. I know their whole history!"

Panni Polanetzki laughed.

"—At all events, more than I do! I made their acquaintance in Rome."

"'Tis not surprising. I have lived so many years in Warsaw, and I knew everybody. Though I spent my days and evenings at home, the social world interested me. I was so light-minded! and your Stach, too, was acquainted with Panni Osnovski."

"Yes, he told me of it: they had met at balls."

"Then she wished to marry Kopovski, but her father would not permit it. However, she made a splendid match. Osnovski is a good man, is he not?"

"And so very kind to her! I did not know she wished to marry Kopovski. . . . and it surprises me. . . . such an intelligent woman!"

"Thank God, she is happy, could she but appreciate it. Happiness is such a rare thing, and one ought to handle it very carefully! I have learned to look at the world dispassionately, as only people can look at it who desire nothing for themselves. . . . And do you know what strikes me frequently? that happiness is like the eyes, which can be blinded by a grain of dust, and shed abundant tears."

"Oh, that is absolutely true!" confirmed Marinya, smiling sadly.

A momentary silence ensued. Panni Chavastovska looked attentively at Marinya, laid her transparent hand on Marinya's and asked:

"Well, and you, Marinya. . . . you are happy, of course?"

Marinya wanted to cry, but she made a supreme effort and checked her tears. Her fine soul was shocked at the thought that her tears and sadness could appear to Emilyya as a complaint of her husband, and, calling to her aid all her will-power, she overcame her emotion and replied: "if only my Stach was happy!"

She raised her moist eyes to Panni Chavastovska. The latter said:

"Lida will pray for your happiness. I merely asked the question, because you looked so gloomy. But I know how wretched he was when you were angry at him on account of Kremen."

Marinya's face was lighted by a happy smile. Every word of his former love was sweet to her; and she was ready to listen to that story her whole life.

Panni Chavastovska continued:

"And you, bad, foolish child! You were so unmerciful, you could not appreciate or esteem sincere affection, so that I often was angered at your conduct, and was afraid lest Stanislav should grow tired of this life, become demoralized, and put an end to his misery. It usually happens that when there is a plait or fold in the depth of one's heart, it can never be smoothed again."

Marinya glanced at Panni Chavastovska and closed her eyes, as a new thought flashed across her mind.

"Ah, Emilyya, Emilyya!" exclaimed she, "how well you speak!"

Panni Chavastovska's name was now Sister Anelia, but Marinya called her Emilyya as of yore.

Sister Anelia expressed her desire to go home. In vain were Marinya's pleadings to remain till the return of her husband: she was expected in the convent, and could stay no longer. However, in true woman-fashion they chatted at the door for fifteen minutes, and finally the Sister went

away, with the promise to visit the Polanetzkis the following Sunday. Marinya escorted her friend to the street, returned to the room and sat in her chair near the window. Dropping her head on her hands she fell into a deep meditation over the words of Panni Chavastovska, and finally uttered aloud: "yes, it is all my own fault!"

It seemed to her that she had found the key to the riddle. She had sinned, and sin must be atoned for, she must love her "Stach" so that he should recover all he had lost. What she wanted was patience, to bear her cross, not to bewail her fate but to thank God and "Stach" for this life, whatever it is. If she meets with grief she will quietly bury it in the bottom of her heart, and remain silent for years, until God shall in his mercy grant her relief. "I will not blunder now," reflected Marinya, and again she wanted to cry, but from joy; but the thought that her Stach would soon return and find her in tears overmastered all others. He came very soon indeed. Marinya's first instinct was to throw herself into his arms, but she suddenly felt so guilty before him, that an unexpected timidity kept her back.

"Was anybody here?" asked he, kissing her forehead.

"Emily was here, but she would not wait for you. She will come again next Sunday."

"Oh, my God!" exclaimed he with displeasure. "You know how I long to see her. Why did you not send for me? You knew where I was, but never gave me a thought!"

And Marinya, like a child that wants to justify itself, began in a voice trembling with tears: "No, Stach. On the contrary, I love you so dearly . . . I always—always think of you!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

"Now, then, ladies and gentlemen, you see," gaily said Zavilovski at Bigel's—"I have been to the Osnovskis. At first I was looked upon as a wolf or a panther, but I proved to be a tame beast, hurt no one, broke nothing, and responded to questions more or less logically. I have long noticed that it is easier to get along than it would seem, and only in the first moments am I afflicted by a desire to run. Those ladies, of course, are in their own spheres—so free, so unceremonious."

"But don't you lead us away from the main subject. Tell us all about it."

"Very well. To begin with, I lost my way—did not know where I was, what to do, where the Osnovskis lived, where Panni Bronich was, whether it was to be one call for the two families, or two."

"Two, of course, they live apart. Panni Bronich has her own apartments, though the parlor they use in common."

"That's just it. I found them all assembled in the parlor. And Panni Osnovski was the first to relieve me by declaring that she willingly shares the honor of my visit with Panni Bronich, and further calls can be dispensed with. I found there also Panni Mashko and Kopovski. The latter is such a handsome man, that his head for the common good might be covered with a velvet bag, such as the jewelers use for diamonds. . . Who's that Kopovski?"

"A fool," replied Polanetzki. "This word comprises his name, his means of support, his occupation, and all further distinctions. I doubt, if even his passport contains any other."

"I understand. Now there becomes clear to me some of his words which I heard. He posed, and the dear ladies, sketched his portrait. Panni Osnovski in oils, standing. Panna Castelli, aquarel,—profile. Both had white aprons on, both looked exceedingly well. Panni Osnovski evidently, only recently began to study, while Castelli wields the brush and pencil like a real painter."

"What was the nature of your conversation?"

"First of all we discussed the state of your health," replied Zavilovski, addressing Marinya. . . "and I told them that you were growing prettier every day. Then painting in general, and portraits in particular, were the subject. I remarked to Castelli that she flattered Kopovski. She insisted that she was not to blame,—it was. . . his own nature. She is a lovely girl, and she said this very loudly. I burst out laughing, the rest followed my example, and with them Kopovski himself. His must be a unique character. He announced that he looked worse to-day for lack of sleep, that he longed to throw himself into the embraces of Orpheus."

—"Orpheus?"

"Yes. And Osnovski unceremoniously corrected him to Morpheus; but he did not submit to the correction and persisted that he saw that play many times, and remembered it well. Naturally, the dear ladies are amusing themselves royally, but thanks to his beauty, are all too willing to paint his portrait. However, Castelli is a remarkable artist, showing me with her pencil various outlines on Kopovski's portraits. She even blushed: 'what a line! What tones!' exclaimed she. It must be admitted that she at the moment resembled a muse. She declared that she is very fond of painting portraits, that she thinks of every face as of a model, that extraordinary heads appear to her in dreams at night."

"And you will be the hero of her dreams in the beginning, then you will pose for her," interposed Marinya! "I am almost certain, and it will be well."

"Oh, yes, she actually told me," replied Zavilovski, "that this was a tax she levied on all her 'intimate friends,' and then she turned to me directly and expressed her desire to sketch my portrait; but were it not for

Panni Bronich this would never have come up for consideration."

"Oh, Panni Bronich played the Muse's hand!" sneered Polanetzki.

"At any rate, it will all be well," repeated Marinya.

"Why?" inquired Zavilovski, gazing at her with his timid, restless glance. The idea that she purposely pushed him into the embrace of another, because she divined what was taking place in his own heart, shocked him.

"Because," replied Marinya, "though I know Linetti very little, and can only judge from the first impression and from what I have heard about her, yet it appears to me that she is an extraordinary type, and 'tis well that you made her acquaintance."

"I also base my judgment on the first impression," said the reassured Zavilovski; "but I think Panna Castelli is less superficial than Panni Osnovski. They are both very pretty, very amiable, young ladies. . . . Maybe I cannot describe them. I know the world so little. But leaving them, I felt as though I had occupied a seat in the same car with beautiful and jolly foreign ladies that entertain, chat, laugh, and no more. There is in them something strange, foreign. You do not feel in their presence that you were raised on the same soil, under the same sun."

"What opinions that poet sports!" observed Polanetzki.

Zavilovski became animated, and on his tender forehead appeared arteries in the shape of the letter V. He understood that in the undervaluing of those ladies he conveyed unstinted praise for Marinya, and this made him talkative.

"Besides," resumed he, "there exists a certain instinct that divines all good intentions and well-wishing of your fellow-man. There you cannot discover it. They are amiable, hospitable, but it all has the repugnant odor of formalism, and therefore I conclude that sincere people will meet with many disappointments there. It's awfully unpleasant to take friendly chaff for grain. As for myself, this is why I am in mortal fear of people, for although, as Pan Polanetzki puts it, I have opinions of my own, yet

I am well aware that I waver after all, and this often perplexes me to a great extent. My nerves do not tolerate such things."

"Because you possess an honest nature," said Panni Bigel.

He stretched out his long hand, with which he was accustomed to gesticulate when he forgot his timidity and wished to speak freely, and said:

"Frankness in life, as in art, is the only great virtue."

But Marinya undertook the defense of the ladies.

"People, and men especially, are frequently unjust and accept their own opinion as facts. As to Osnovski and Castelli, how can one pass judgment on them after he had seen them only twice? They are jolly, good-natured, hospitable, and whence comes all this if not from pure kindness of heart?"

Then, turning to Zavilovski, she began to pique him, now jokingly, then seriously.

"And still you are not as honest as Panni Bigel claims, for these ladies are lavish in praising you, while you seem to have nothing but scorn for them."

"Well, my dearest, you are becoming extremely artless yourself. You are measuring the world with your own yard-stick," interrupted her husband. "Accidental goodness and affability can only be prompted by egoism that strives to have a gay old time. If you respect sincerity so highly," added he to Zavilovski, "there she is face to face with you—a real type."

"I know, I know!" exclaimed Zavilovski with rapture.

"And did you want me to be otherwise?" laughingly asked Marinya.

"No," replied her husband, joining in her laughter, "but how lucky for instance, that you are no longer a little one and need not high-heeled shoes, for if you wore them you would always suffer from a congested conscience, because you deceived the world."

Marinya, noticing that Zavilovski's admiring glances turned to her feet, unwillingly hid them behind her chair, and changing the tone of the conversation, asked: "How soon will your collection of poems see the light of day?"

"In a few days, at least that was my first intention, but I added a new poem, and it will be delayed somewhat."

"May we know the name of that new creation?"

"A Lily."

"Is not Linetti your lily?"

"No."

Panni Polanetzki's face became grave and serious. It was easy to conjecture that the poem was dedicated to her, and she was surprised that only herself and Zavilovski were aware of that fact, and this laid the foundation to a sort of secret, known only to them. She did not like it. It seemed inconsistent with that discussion of sincerity just held, and sinful toward her husband.

Zavilovski, who became attached to Marinya with the egoism of an idler, to whom that feeling was pleasing and he wished no more, finally understood that Marinya read the secrets of his heart as an open book, and if he did not succeed in closing that book to her glances, their relations would be abruptly ended. And he began to ponder how to avoid the loss of all he possessed, and not only have the opportunity of seeing Marinya, but to see her more often. At last he decided on a course that led, as he believed, along a straight road.

"I will pretend to fall in love with Panna Castelli," said he to himself—"and will tell Marinya of my love . . . this will not only not tear us apart, it will bring us nearer together. . . . I will make her my patroness."

He really began to imagine that he was enraptured with the "sleeping queen," that he is unhappy and confesses his love to Marinya, who listens to him with moistened eyes, and like a sister, puts her tender hand on his forehead. This play of fancy seemed so natural and vivid, the impressions so great, that he actually fancied the expression, the forms of speech he would use in telling Marinya of his tribulations that she might feel for him.

Returning home with her husband, Panni Polanetzki thought of the poem which Zavilovski entitled, "A Lily." As a woman, she was partly interested in him and partly feared him. She feared those complications that might arise in her relations toward Zavilovski in the future, and

under the influence of these misgivings, she said to her husband:

"Do you know, Stach, I think Linetti would insure Zavilovski's happiness forever."

"Probably. But tell me what do you want with that Zavilovski and that girl?"

"I am not a match-maker, I am only suggesting. True, Anette Osnovski is all aflame with it, but this is not surprising: she is so lively, so inflammable, like a spark."

"Not so lively as daring, and believe me, not so artless as she appears to be. She has her own plans. At times I believe that Castelli is interesting her as much as she does me, that at the bottom of it all there is something else."

"What else?"

"I do not know; probably, because it does not interest me in the least. As a rule I distrust these 'dear ladies.'"

Their conversation was interrupted by Mashko who was approaching their house in a hansom. At the sight of them he hastened to greet Marinya, and then said to Polanetzki:

"I am glad we met. I am going away in a few days and as your note is due to-day I brought you the money. I have seen your father," added he, turning to Marinya. "Pan Plavitski feels splendidly, and only persists that he pines for the village, for housekeeping, and therefore contemplates buying a small estate in the suburbs. I told him that if we win our case he might retain Ploshkoff."

The conversation was not pleasant to Marinya. It sounded ironical and she did not wish to continue it. A few minutes later Polanetzki led Mashko away into the study.

"Everything all right?" asked he.

"Here is a part of the money due you," evasively replied Mashko, "be kind enough to give me a receipt."

Polanetzki sat down at his desk and made out a receipt.

"And now, there's another little affair," continued Mashko. "Some time ago I sold you an oak forest with the condition that I might come into possession of it again on the payment of the original and interest. I hope

I have nothing against it. I ought to thank you for it;

you have done me a great service, and if you ever are in a similar position, please come to me without ceremony. A service for a service! You know that I like to be grateful."

"I think that monkey wants to patronize me," thought Polanetzki, "and had he not been his guest, he would perhaps, have let him know his opinion of the matter, but he controlled himself and said:

"I have nothing at all to say, for such was our agreement, and I never paid much attention to it."

"I shall know how to appreciate it," patronizingly replied Mashko.

"Well, and how are your affairs generally? I see that you are going full-sail."

The cause of the charitable institutions is placed in the hands of a new lawyer, one Seliodka (herring). A beautiful name, is it not? Were I to call my cat by that name, the feline would cry itself dead. But I shall put plenty of pepper on that Seliodka, and devour him. You ask how my affairs are? It's more than probable that at the end of the process, I will safely climb out of that mire of law as a profession, which, to tell you the truth, is not to my taste at all, and will take up my residence in Kremen."

"With plenty of cold cash in your pocket?"

"Yes. Enough of law! Besides, whoever traces his origin to the earth, will always return to it. This heredity is absorbed with the mother's milk. But let's drop this. To-morrow afternoon, as I said before, I will leave Warsaw. I leave my wife in your gentle care, for old Panni Kraslovska went to Vienna to an oculist. I have one more visit to make: to the Osnovskis, that they, too, may remember my wife in my absence."

"As to ourselves, we will be delighted!" replied Polanetzki.

"How long have you been acquainted with the Osnovskis?" added he, recalling his conversation with his wife.

"A few months. But my wife has known them longer. Osnovski is a rich man. He had but one sister, and an uncle, a miser, who died and willed him an immense for-

tune. As to her, what can one say? She reads a good deal, anything that comes into her hands, she had and still has pretensions to being clever, and . . . in a word . . . of being almost everything else one can possibly pretend to be. If I'll add that she was in love with Kopovski, you will know her whole biography."

"And Panni Bronich, and Castelli?"

"Castelli is liked more by women than by men. This is an ominous sign. But after all I can say of her little more than is said by the world at large. The same Kopovski courted her, or does so now. Panni Bronich——"

Mashko laughed aloud.

"Panni Bronich the Khedive of Egypt escorted to the summit of the pyramid of Cheops; the late Alphonso, King of Spain, said to her every morning: *Bon jour, madame la comtesse!* Musse inscribed verses in her album in 1856, and Von Moltke sat on her trunk at Karlsbad. In short, she was everywhere since Castelli grew up, or, rather, rose a few inches. The "sweet" aunt "travels" at the expense of her niece, in which she is generously assisted by Panni Osnovski. I don't know with what motive. This is all, unless I say a few words of the late Pan Bronich. He died six years ago, from an unknown disease, because his affectionate wife is always inventing a new one, adding to it that he was the last of the princes (one of the three princes that founded the Russian empire, and almost the father of the Slavs), and neglecting to mention the fact that he was the manager of the estates of the Radultovskis, in which occupation he made a fortune. But enough! 'Vanity fair! . . .' Fare-thee-well, do your business right, and in case of need count on me. If I knew that such an occasion would soon present itself I would exact your promise to turn to no one else except myself. Farewell!"

And Mashko, shaking Polanetzki's hand, went away.

Polanetzki shrugged his shoulders and said:

"I ought to be thankful that he did not slap my back! Vanity fair, vanity fair! Such a shrewd man, too, and he cannot see through the most simple thing—namely, that emptiness in himself which he ridicules in others. Recently he seems to have changed; the man ceased to

pretend, but no sooner did the crisis pass than he became possessed of the devil."

Polanetzki recollected what Vaskovski said of the shallowness of mind and eternal comedy.

"And yet such people seem to thrive in our midst," mused he.

CHAPTER XXIV.

PANNI OSNOVSKI entirely forgot her "Florentine-Roman nights." She was surprised when her husband reminded her of it. What nights! Could she think of such trifles now! Her mind was entirely absorbed with the "taming of the eagle." Osnovski listened to the chatter of his wife, melted in admiration, and at every available opportunity tried to seize her hands and cover them with kisses, even to the very elbows. Once he put to her the same question that Polanetzki asked his wife:

"What do you want of that Zavilovski?"

"*La reine s'amuse!*" coquettishly replied she. "It does not take great science to write books—only a little talent, and that's all. But to bring into real, actual life what the books propagate is a much more complicated task, and it's amusing, too. Maybe, I have my own motives," added she after a pause—"and if I have, you ought to guess it."

"I will whisper it in your ear."

She turned to him her ear with a roguish look, and winked her violet eyes, but to Osnovski it was an opportunity to kiss that pink ear, and repeated her secrets in the words:

"*La reine s'amuse!*"

And he was right. Panni Osnovski had her own motives in conspiring to unite Linetti with Zavilovski. All romantic ventures amused and interested her greatly. With these intentions she frequently visited Panni Polanetzki to gain some information about "the eagle," and often returned home with glowing reports; for Zavilovski, wishing to allay the suspicions of Marinya, began to speak often of Linetti. His diplomacy proved fruitful. Once Panni Osnovski asked Marinya if, in her opinion, Zavilovski was not deep in the meshes of love, to

which Panni Polanetzki answered: "He is, but you are not his goddess, nor am I. The apple of priority belongs to Linetti, and for us it is to cry, laugh or to seek consolation."

Young Panna Castelli at the same time lived in constant subjection to her thoughts and feelings. From morning till night it was hammered into her that "the eagle" was captured, that he is at her feet, that such an exceptional being as she cannot but feel it. This flattered her vanity. Painting the portrait of Kopovski she exulted in her own admiration of his features, and loved him because he was the subject of much discussion which to her proved his undoubted shrewdness and wit.

She loved him for many other reasons. But Zavilovski was also quite handsome, though he persisted in not wearing a beard, not wearing good clothes. But he had the wings of an eagle to offset all other defects; and a soul like hers, people claimed, was bound to understand him. Everybody said the same! Osnovski, who, adoring his wife, loved everything else that had some relation to her, took a warm interest in the matter. Zavilovski was a sympathetic chap. The information he gathered about him was all in his favor. He was somewhat wild, proud and obstinate, besides secretive, but a very able man. When all these characteristics charmed the ladies, Osnovski determined seriously to do something. Zavilovski's conduct justified the general view of the affair. He appeared frequently in the "common" parlor and devoted more time to Linetti. It was noticed that his glance rested on the young girl very often, that when she paced the room his eyes followed her. To diplomacy was added curiosity. However, things took a serious turn when his first volume of poems appeared. His poems had attracted attention before, but were soon forgotten, owing to the long intervals in their publication in periodicals. Now a volume of them made a tremendous impression. There was a power in his poems, a sparkling sincerity that was striking. His style, too, now ringing with a clear sound, seemed to bend and fly at the same time and assume the finest tunes, shapes and forms. The sensation grew in intensity and soon the whispers of praise became a matter of surprise and astonishment, and as is usual in such cases—exagger-

ations. His poems received the stamp of approval, but they were over-estimated. From editorial rooms his name passed into the homes of the public. He became the talk of the town and aroused the more interest, from the fact that he was absolutely unknown. Old and wealthy Zavilovski, the father of Helen, who was accustomed to say there were only two portions of punishment in the world: The gout and poor relatives, now replied to all interrogations: "Mais oui, mais oui,—c'est mon cousin!" Such an opinion from the old man was a good omen to all, especially to Panni Bronich. Even Osnovski and Castelli were finally reconciled with the "tasteless" pin in Zavilovski's scarf, and began to consider it "original." Thanks to the appearance of the volume, in the office of Bigel and Polanetzki all was joy and happiness. The old cashier Valkovski, the agent Abdulzki and the bookkeeper Pozniakovski were proud of their comrade, as if his glory laid its shadows upon the whole establishment. Bigel meditated for two long days, and finally reached the conclusion that Zavilovski could not subsist on the modest salary he received from the firm. But when he questioned Zavilovski, the latter replied:

"Good! Very good, my friend! Because people choose to talk about me, you wish to rob me of my piece of bread and pleasant comradeship. I could not find a publisher, and had it not been for that same salary the book would never have seen daylight."

Such arguments could not be disputed. Zavilovski clung to his position. From that day he became a frequent visitor at the houses of Bigel and Polanetzki. For a week after the publication of his poems, he did not appear in the "common parlor" of the Osnovskis, feeling that he had committed a crime. He was finally persuaded by the combined eloquence of Panni Bigel and Polanetzki to go there. He called one evening and found them all leaving the house for the theater. They expressed a desire to remain at home, to which he would not consent. He willingly accompanied them.

"An excellent idea!" exclaimed Panni Osnovski. "Yuzia will buy another ticket for himself in the orchestra."

And "Yuzia" bought a ticket. Zavilovski occupied with Linetti the front seats in the box. Panni Osnovski and Panni Bronich sat behind them. Both ladies announced that they would be their "mother," and therefore gave up their choice seats.

"You can go ahead and speak of anything you like," said Panni Osnovski with a roguish smile, "and if anybody comes into the box, I will engage them in conversation, so that no one will interfere with you."

When it was known in the audience who it was that was sitting in that box, the eyes of the majority of the people were directed towards them.

On her part, Panni Osnovski kept her promise, and when Kopovski entered her box, she began to chatter with him so lively that he hardly had time to greet Castelli and to say to Zavilovski:

—"Ah, you are writing poems!"

After this discovery he added:

—"I would like very much to read poems, but, strange to say, whenever I read them, I begin to think of something else."

The young girl cast upon him a significant glance, and it would be hard to say, whether it expressed anger or surprise of an *artiste*, for his brainless head appeared in the shade of the box, like the portrait of a celebrated artist.

After the performance Panni Osnovski invited the poet to partake of tea, and he departed with them. But they had hardly arrived home, when Panni Bronich began to reprimand Zavilovski:

—"You are a bad man," exclaimed she, "and if anything happens to Linetti, I will declare you guilty. Think of it, the child does not eat, drink, or sleep, and is continually reading your poems!"

—"And I also have cause for complaint!" added Panni Osnovski, "she has a copy of your book and refuses it to everybody; and when we get angry, do you know what she cries?"

"It is mine! It is mine!"

Though Linetti had not the book at this moment, yet she pressed her hand to her breast, as if she would defend it against an attack, and answered calmly and softly:

—"Because it is indeed mine, yes, mine!"

Zavilovski looked at her, and something went straight to her heart.

Returning home, he passed the house of Polanetzki, where a light was to be seen. After the performance and his talk with the Osnovskis he felt somewhat dazed, but the light in the windows startled him. The pure and faultless image of Panni Polanetzki appeared before his eyes, and attracted him with great power. He felt as one who thinks of something good and precious, and on his way home he recited to himself a part of his poem, "The Lily," the most inspiring he had ever written.

But there was good cause for the light burning late in Polanetzki's house. After their evening tea Marinya suddenly grew pale, then flushed, and cried excitedly: "Stach!"

—"What is the matter, dear?" he asked, surprised at her exclamation and excitement.

—"Come nearer, and I will tell you."

And she embraced him and whispered something, after which he kissed her and said:

—"But don't be excited. . . It may harm you. . . ."

However, he also was agitated, and nervously began to pace up and down. Then he kissed her and remarked:

—"Usually, men wish that their first-born would be a boy, but my desire is to have a girl and to name her Lida. Bear it in mind."

They could not get asleep for a long time, which accounts for Zavilovski having seen the light in their house.

CHAPTER XXV.

A WEEK later, when the condition of Marinya had been ascertained, Polanetzki communicated the glad news to the Bigels and Panni Bigel hurried to Panni Polanetzki, who began to weep, pressing herself to her friend's bosom.

—"I think," said she, "that Stach will now love me more."

—"How is it more?" asked Panni Bigel.

—"I meant to say, still more! You know: it is never enough for me, I am always discontented."

Meanwhile Marinya dried her tears, and began to smile.

—"My God!" exclaimed she, clasping her hands as for prayer, "send me a daughter! . . . My husband wants only a daughter."

—"And what would you like?"

—"I?—But don't tell it to Stach: I would prefer a boy, but let it be a daughter."

And she added pensively:

—"Nature will not consult us, is it not so?"

—"Of course not," laughed Panni Bigel, "we are quite helpless in this respect."

At the same time Bigel made it known in the office that the firm would soon have a new partner, a tiny Polanetzki, and when Polanetzki appeared, all the clerks warmly congratulated him, except Zavilovski, who pretended to be absorbed in his work. But fearing that his silence would attract the attention of all present, he shook hands with Polanetzki, and repeated with a broken voice:

—"I congratulate you! I congratulate you!"

Now it seemed to him that he was foolish and comical, and that the whole world was tremendously flat and dull. And when he thought of his poems, inspired by "The

Lily," he felt quite miserable. What a fool he was! Why had he not foreseen such a course of events! Had he opened his heart to her, had she rejected him with contempt, and had Polanetzki thrown him out, there would be, at least, something dramatic, but now—it is too stupid! His sensitive nature could not endure this rude shock, though his love for Marinya was not strong and deep. The hours he had to pass in the office seemed to him an endless torture. One moment he rose to take his hat and go away to return no more. But, happily, he was soon relieved, by the time for closing, and all began to leave the office.

Passing by the mirror in the antechamber he caught a glance of his face, which seemed to him to look so ridiculous, that he said to himself:

"How buffoonlike I look!" He did not go to dinner with the bookkeeper as usual, but shut himself up in his room, feeling quite miserable and ridiculous. But after a few days he became calm; feeling, however, a void in his heart. He did not visit the Polanetzki for two weeks, and when he met Marinya at Bigel's country home, he was very disagreeably affected by her changed appearance: There was no great change in her except her face had lost its former freshness. She looked sad, as if disheartened. Zavilovski, who was after all kind-hearted, could not look at her without some feeling of pain.

But if her face was changed, her kindness and benevolence remained as before. She heartily greeted Zavilovski, asked about Castelli, and noticing that he was unwilling to speak of her, she began to smile pleasantly, and said cheerfully:

—"Well, well; but they are surprised at not having seen you for so long a time, and do you know what Anette and Panni Bronich told me? They said—but I cannot repeat it in the presence of all. Let us walk in the garden."

She rose to go, but so awkwardly that she stumbled and nearly fell.

—"Look out!" shouted Polanetzki.

She looked at him in dismay and said, blushing: "But it was accidental, Stach!"

—"You must not frighten her!" interrupted Panni Bigel, looking reproachfully at Polanetzki.

Evidently Polanetzki cared more about the future child than about his wife, and Zavilovski understood it so. As to Marinya, she knew it long ago, and it made her suffer terribly, all the more because she could not breathe it to anybody. She was torturing herself, and this undermined her health and explained her sadness.

Polanetzki would have been greatly surprised if somebody told him that he did not love and esteem his wife. He loved her in his way. Being of a quick and resolute nature, he sometimes showed too much anxiety about the child; he did not conceal it, and never entertained the thought that Marinya might feel hurt at this anxiety. It seemed to him that one of her duties was to have children, and on this account he thought that he should be full of attention to her. As she was growing less attractive every day, and as his æsthetic sense was sometimes hurt by it, he imagined that by concealing his feelings, and by trying to show her sympathy, he was as considerate and mindful of her as any one could be under the same circumstances.

But she thought and felt otherwise, and at first she could not bear the polite attentions of her husband. She was in a state of mental revolt, regretting her condition, and being even jealous of its cause, but it did not last long, and she soon became reconciled, and persuaded herself to consider the matter as something usual and natural. Why should a father not think of his child? Why should she worry herself? She accused herself of being an egoist, repented, and said to herself: "Be quiet, my poor heart! Such is life, such is the natural order of things, and such is the will of God."

Now, walking with Zavilovski in the garden, her thoughts turned toward him. She wanted to talk with him about Linetti, as she had learned from Panni Osnovski that the girl had fallen in love with him.

—"I have something to tell you," said she, "though I am not sure whether it is right to do so. Panni Osnovski told me—But no! I must first know why you have not visited them lately."

—"I have been sick and in trouble. I could not go out. . . ."

—"Well, I wanted to know, because I thought that, possibly, you might be angry with them. Panni Osnovski said that Linetti thought you were vexed at her, and once she saw tears in Linetti's eyes."

Zavilovski flushed and exclaimed:

"Ah, my God! How can I get angry with her? She is so harmless."

—"I only repeat what I heard. It is true, Panni Osnovski is such a babbler that you can never rely on what she says; but in this case, it seems to me, she is truthful. Anyway, Linetti is a nice, charming girl, and I must confess that when I heard of her tears, I was greatly affected. Poor girl!"

—"And I am disturbed, moved to my inmost soul," answered Zavilovski.

Their conversation was interrupted by the appearance of Polanetzki, who said to his wife:

—"Well, you are still making matches! How incorrigible women are! But I must tell you, Marinya, I will be glad if you will not mix yourself in such matters."

Panni Polanetzki began to justify herself, but he turned to Zavilovski and added:

—"I am not concerned at all in this matchmaking; but, to tell you the truth, I have not a particle of confidence in those ladies."

But Zavilovski's imagination was aroused, and when he went home, he was dreaming of Linetti. He was not yet in love with her, but he indulged himself with thoughts of her and was carried away by his dreams of the girl. He resolved to see her the next day, and began to write a poem with the title "Cobweb."

He was anxious to go as early as possible to Panni Bronich's, but waited for the hour when all were at the tea-table. Panni Osnovski greeted him warmly and laughed merrily. He looked inquiringly at Linetti, and his heart began to beat quicker, when he found that her face brightened.

"Do you know what I was thinking?" exclaimed Panni Osnovski with her usual vivacity. "Our Linetti

is so fond of men with beards, that I thought you had decided not to call again until you had raised a beard."

"No, no, I prefer to see you as you appeared when we first met," said Castelli.

"Yes, he was hiding himself from us," broke in Osnovski, "but I have a scheme to stop that: Linetti, start to paint his portrait, and he will be obliged to call every day."

Panni Osnovski joyfully clapped her hands.

—"How clever you are, Yuzia!" cried she.

The face of Yuzia was radiant. It was unusual for him to hear such compliments from his wife.

"I thought of it," confessed Castelli, "but I was afraid to weary him."

"I am at your service," bowed Zavilovski, "when do you desire to commence?"

"The days are longer now, so we can commence at four, after Kopovski's sitting. I will soon finish his portrait."

"Do you know what she said about Kopovski?" asked Panni Bronich.

But Castelli did not allow her to finish. Plavitski came in and gave another turn to the conversation. He had met Panni Osnovski at Marinya's, and, as he openly confessed, "lost his head." She flirted with him unmercifully, and he greatly enjoyed it.

"Sit down here, near me," said she merrily, "and we will be comfortable."

"As in paradise, as in paradise!" repeated he, quite delighted.

Meanwhile Zavilovski said to Linetti:

"I am happy at the prospect of being here every day. But will I not take your time?"

"You will, surely," answered she, looking straight at him, "but you will do it better than any one else. I was really afraid to annoy you, as you frighten me."

Now he looked straight at her and gravely pronounced:

"Pray, don't be afraid of me."

Linetti cast her eyes down, and both were silent. She soon broke the silence, whispering:

"What was the cause of your long absence?" He

was prompted to answer: because I was afraid of you, but didn't dare to be so bold."

"I was writing all the time," said he.

"Poems?"

"Yes, I will bring you one to-morrow—the "Cobweb." Do you remember that you once told me you would like to be a cobweb? I did not forget it, and from that moment I only saw before me a white filament flying in the air."

"Yes, it flies, but only when it is carried away by some outside force, and it cannot fly high, unless—"

"Unless what? Finish, please."

"Unless it is fastened upon the wings of an eagle."

And she rose quickly and went to help Osnovski open the window. Zavilovski was greatly perplexed, but he recovered himself when Panni Bronich approached him and said:

"Two days ago old Zavilovski told me that you were his relative, but you did not call on him, and he could not leave his house as he is afflicted with gout. Why don't you visit him? He is such a good and worthy man. Go and see him, will you?"

"Well, I'll go," answered he; at this moment he would have agreed to any proposition.

"How good you are! You will find your cousin Helen there. But don't fall in love with her, she is a nice girl."

"Oh, that would not happen, surely!" exclaimed he laughingly.

"People say that she was in love with Ploshovski, who shot himself, and that she still mourns him in her heart. . . . When will you call on them?"

"To-morrow or day after."

"You see, they are going to the country, as the summer is approaching. Where will you go?"

"I don't know. And you?"

Linetti returned, and hearing the question of Zavilovski, interrupted their conversation:

"We have not yet decided."

"We intended to stay at Scheveningen," said Panni Bronich, "but it would be troublesome on account of

Linetti. She is always courted, surrounded by young men," added she, lowering her voice.

And she began to tell so many stories of Linetti's successes and conquests in different summer resorts, that the girl was annoyed and hurriedly left them. But this gave Panni Bronich a fresh opportunity to praise the girl's modesty and to relate without reserve other stories of Linetti's successes.

Zavilovski was bored to death by her and her stories; but he had no relief until Osnovski called the chattering lady. He took this occasion to bid them good-night; and pressing Linetti's hand, he said tenderly:

—"To-morrow then!"

—"Yes, to-morrow. . . . But don't forget to bring the "Cobweb". . . . I am so anxious to read it!"

—"Surely not. . . . How can I forget it!" replied he, nearly overcome with emotion.

He left, together with Plavitski, and as soon as they were in the street, the old man tapped him on his shoulder, and said:

—"Do you know, young man that I will soon be a grandfather?"

—"I do."

—"Yes, a grandfather," added he, smiling joyfully, "and nevertheless I tell you, there is no better woman than a young and married one."

And he laughed, looking significantly at Zavilovski, and putting his fingers to his lips, he smacked them and went away.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ZAVILOVSKI called every day on Aunt Bronich and often met Kopovski, whose portrait was not yet finished. Linetti said that she had some trouble in painting the face; but with Zavilovski's portrait she made better progress.

—"In a head like Kopovski's," explained she, "it is enough to change the least line, to give another light, and the whole is spoiled. But as to Zavilovski's head, it is only necessary to catch its character."

This explanation was satisfactory to both men, and Kopovski even remarked that it was not his fault that the Lord had created him so. Panni Bronich told after, that Linetti had added: "the Lord has created, the Son has redeemed, but the Holy Spirit has not penetrated." This jest was soon repeated all over Warsaw.

But Zavilovski liked this narrow-minded man, the more as he was no longer considered a rival. His stupidity was amusing, and the ladies liked him for it, and played with him as with a toy.

The spring passed, and the time for the races was at hand. Zavilovski was invited to accompany the Osnovskis. He was sitting in their carriage opposite Linetti, highly delighted. She seemed to him like a spring-flower in her bright dress and with her rosy face. Her attractive figure stood before him when he was alone in his room. She had taken possession of his thoughts and heart.

But he was not at ease in the society about her. She was the center of attraction for many young men, who were using every opportunity to pay her compliments. When alone with her, he was quite happy, forgetting every thing, wholly absorbed in his ardent love. At the same time his poetical inspiration was aroused, and he was writing and writing. He was no longer ashamed of his

poetry, as he felt that it made him a hero in the eyes of his beloved Linetti.

Panni Bronich decided to stay with Linetti at Osnovski's estate during a part of June and July, and then to go to Scheveningen. Zavilovski many times asked himself the question whether they would invite him to accompany them; but when they did so, he thanked them and pretended to be very busy. Linetti was silently listening to his excuses, and when he was leaving, she approached him and asked:

—"Why do you refuse to go to Pritulovo?"

—"Because I am afraid," answered he when, he found that nobody was looking at them.

She laughingly said:

"What is necessary to give you courage?"

—"One word, you have only to say: 'Come!'" said he with a tremulous voice.

She was hesitating to comply with his demand in such an imperative form, but after a while whispered: "Come!" and fled away confused and excited.

Zavilovski returned home, radiant, filled with joy.

The Osnovskis were to leave the city in ten days, and meanwhile Zavilovski came regularly every day to sit for his portrait. He would not miss it for the greatest fortune. Panni Bronich was often present, and she continually praised the girl, telling different improbable stories about her. He did not believe her, but was glad to hear her praises of Linetti. On that point he was willing to talk with her days and nights.

Prompted by Panni Bronich, he called on old Zavilovski, the Cræsus with whom he had no acquaintance. The old nobleman greeted him familiarly, with one foot resting on a chair.

—"Excuse me, that I remain sitting," said he, "but the accursed gout holds me fast. I cannot get rid of it, it is hereditary! It seems to me that it will always torment our family. By the way, do you sometimes feel a pain in your thumb?"

—"No," answered the young man, surprised at his question and reception.

"Wait, it will come in due time," consoled the old

man, and calling his daughter and presenting him to her as a cousin, he began to talk about relationship, and then remarked:

—"I confess, I never wrote any poems and did not care for it, but I was gratified when I saw my name under such nice poems."

But this visit had an unpleasant and abrupt end. The conversation turned on their mutual friends and acquaintances, and old Zavilovski gave his opinion of them with rude frankness. When the names of Panni Bronich and Castelli were mentioned, he called the first: "cheat," and the second he characterized with the exclamation: "Venetian imp!"

At the same moment young Zavilovski jumped up, burning with anger. His timidity gave way to exasperation, and looking with fiery eyes at the old man, he said harshly:

—"You have an unpleasant way of characterizing people, and I therefore will be pleased to bid you farewell."

He bowed, took his hat and disappeared. The old nobleman, who was accustomed to speak freely of everybody and to have his way in everything, was stupefied, and after a long silence said to his daughter:

—"What is the matter with him? Is he crazy?" Zavilovski did not breathe a word of the occurrence to Panni Bronich; he simply stated that he paid a visit to his rich relative and that neither the father nor the daughter pleased him. But she learned everything from the old nobleman, who used to call Castelli in her presence: "Venetian imp."

—"But you sent a big devil," said he to Panni Bronich, "it is fortunate that he did not break my head."

Linetti was delighted to learn that a single disrespectful word about her could provoke Zavilovski to such a degree of anger, and when they were alone, she said:

—"How strange it is, that I have so little faith in human sincerity! It is so hard to believe that anybody, except my aunt, would defend me."

—"Why?"

—"I really can't tell."

—"And how about me?" asked he softly.

—“ I am sure you would not permit anybody to insult me ; I feel that you are sincerely attached to me, though I don't know why, as I don't deserve it.”

—“ You ! ” cried he, rising, “ you don't deserve it ! But, mind, I will not permit even you to speak disrespectfully of yourself ! ”

Linetti smiled and said :

—“ Very well, but, please, sit down, otherwise I cannot paint.”

He obeyed, but he began to look at her with such an expression of love and delight, that she was disturbed.

—“ What a rebellious model you are ! ” cried she. “ Turn your head a little to the right, and don't look at me ! ”

—“ I cannot, I cannot ! ” sighed he.

—“ And I can't paint. Your portrait was commenced with you in another position . . . Wait ! ”

And she came to him, and touched his temples with her fingers to place his head in the original position ; but he was so overcome with emotion that he seized her hand, and eagerly pressed it to his lips.

—“ What are you doing ? ” whispered she.

But he continued to kiss her hand fervently, and she hastily said :

—“ Have a talk with my aunt . . . We are going to-morrow . . . ”

They could say nothing more, for Panni Osnovski and Pan Kopovski came in. Observing the flushed cheeks of Linetti, Panni Osnovski looked rapidly at Zavilovski and asked :

—“ Well, how are you getting along ? ”

—“ And where is aunt ? ” broke in Linetti.

—“ Went to make calls.”

—“ How long ? ”

—“ But a few minutes ago . . . Well, how far are you with the portrait ? ”

—“ Pretty far, but it is enough for to-day.”

And she put aside the brushes, and went to wash her hands.

Zavilovski remained, answering questions as reasonably as he could under the circumstances ; but he eagerly

wanted to run away. He was afraid of the forthcoming explanation with Panni Bronich, and, as is usually the case with timid people, he wanted to postpone it until to-morrow. He desired to be alone and seriously think over the matter, as he felt that at this moment his thoughts were in a chaos and that his future was in the balance. The very thought of it made him shudder and even tremble. He felt that this was not the time to retract his steps, that he must advance through love, declaration and proposal to the very portals of the church. True, he sought this with all his yearning soul, but accustomed to consider everything called happiness, a mere poetical vision, something belonging to the world of thought, dreams and art, he dared not believe that Castelli would ever become his wife. He was sitting as it were on live coals, and as soon as Linetti returned, he bade her farewell. She gave him her hand, cold from the water, and inquired: "Will you not wait for aunt?"

"No, I must go now. I will come again to-morrow to take leave of you and Panni Bronich so *au revoir!*"

This parting, after all that had occurred, appeared to Zavilovski, so cold and unnatural, that he was in despair. He dared not give the parting another aspect, for Panni Osnovski scanned them closely.

"Wait,"—said Osnovski, "I shall bear you company. I have some business to attend to in the city."

They went out together. But no sooner had they passed the gates of the villa than Osnovski stopped, placed his hand on Zavilovski's shoulder, and asked:

"You don't mean to say that you quarreled with Linetti?"

Zavilovski widely opened his eyes.

—"I, with Linetti?"

"Yes. Your leavetaking was a frost. I expected you would kiss her hand."

Zavilovski's eyes became larger. Osnovski laughed and continued:

"Well, in that case I may just as well make a clean breast of it. My wife, a curious woman, looked at you and guessed what had happened. Pan Zavilovski, you may consider me your best friend, one who knows

what it is to love, who can only tell you one thing,—God grant you such happiness as fell to my lot since I was married to my wife.”

And he tapped him in a friendly manner on the shoulder. Zavilovski, though extremely agitated and confused, could scarcely resist the temptation to embrace him.

“Have you really so much work to do?” asked Osnovski; “why did you leave the ladies so soon?”

“To speak frankly, I wished to collect my thoughts. Besides, I took fright at Panni Bronich.”

—“You don’t know Aunt Bronich. Her head is in a whirl. Come, escort me a little distance, then you can go back, without ceremony. On the road your thoughts will gradually collect themselves. In the meantime auntie will have returned home, and you will convince her in a speech so eloquent and touching, that she will melt in tears. But remember, that if your efforts are crowned with success, you owe it all to my Anette, because it was she who turned Castelli’s head, as if she had been your own sister. She has such a fiery head, and such a good generous heart. There may be good women in this world, but surely none better than my Anette. At first she thought that that imbecile Kopovski courted Castelli, and it angered her. True, she likes him, but allow her to marry such a fool . . . that would be too much.”

Thus conversing with Zavilovski he took his hand, and after a pause, resumed: “It won’t do for us to address each other ‘you,’ we shall soon be relatives. So I must tell thee, I don’t doubt that Linetti is sincerely fond of you, because she is an honest girl. But she has been talked to so much lately about you, and she is so young, that the fire must be kept up. . . . As to you, spare no wood. . . . You understand that love must grow up with her. This can be easily achieved, for hers is an exceptional nature. Do not think that I wish to frighten you or to caution you. No. A beginning must be made,—there is no doubt that she loves you. Oh, if you only saw how she fondled your book of poems.” A foolish idea struck me then, and I said that old Zavilovski’s object in renewing your acquaintance was to marry you to his daughter,

that his family estate should pass into the hands of another member of the same family, bearing the same name. Poor Linetti grew pale like a sheet of paper. She frightened me, and I hastened to turn it into a joke. Well, what have you got to say?"

Zavilovski wanted to weep and to laugh, but he merely pressed Osnovski's hand to his lip, and after a pause, said: "I am not only unworthy of her, but——"

"Well, and what is to follow that 'but'? Perhaps, you wished to say that, 'you did not love her as much.'"

"This may be so," replied Zavilovski, raising his eyes to heaven.

"In such a case, lose no time, my boy, go back at once and compose your little speech for Aunt Bronich. Do not shy at pathetics. She loves it. Good-by, Ignati. I will return in an hour, and to-night we shall come to an understanding."

They shook hands with true brotherly affection. Before going, Osnovski added: "I repeat: God grant you may find in Linetti such a wife as my Anette."

Returning home, Zavilovski thought that Osnovski was an angel, his wife a second, Panni Bronich a third, and Linetti hovered over them, spreading her wings like a cherub, like a deity. Now he understood that a heart could love till it ached. He approached the villa, inhaling the fragrance of the flowers blooming in abundance, and having a vague idea that the intoxicating odor was a part of his happiness. Going there he repeated to himself: "What people, what a family! Only among then such a swan could grow up!" He looked at the peaceful skies, and in the stillness of the night he saw in the wee little planets that floated in space a caress and kindness. . . . They seemed to gaze at the world,—caressed him and blessed him. Zavilovski did not pray in words, but everything sang within his heart a grateful hymn. He came to his senses only at the gates of the villa, and, as if awakening from a long sleep, he espied the old servant of the Osnovskis, who stood at the gate and looked at the passers-by.

"Good evening, Stanislav," said Zavilovski, "has Panni Bronich returned?"

"No. I am waiting for her."

"Are the ladies in the parlor?"

"Yes, and Pan Kopovski is with them."

"Who will open the door for me?"

"It is not shut. I have been out only a minute or so."

Zavilovski went upstairs, but not finding any one in the parlor, went into the studio. It was also deserted; but from the adjoining room, through the portières that divided the parlor from the studio came a faint whisper. Thinking that he might find there the two ladies, he gently raised the portière, and remained standing, as if nailed to the spot. He was benumbed, paralyzed. Castelli was not there. Instead, Kopovski was on his knees before Panni Osnovski, who, sinking her fingers in his thick hair, bent his head, now backward, now to herself, as if for a kiss.

"Anette, if you love me, darling," whispered Kopovski in a choking, passionate voice.

"Yes, sweetheart, I do, but I cannot, and will not," replied Panni Osnovski, slightly repulsing him.

Zavilovski's hand dropped. Unwillingly he released his hold of the portière, lingered a moment or two, his feet seemed to turn into blocks of wood. At last he passed the studio, the thick carpet of which deadened the sound of his step, into the main parlor and the ante-chamber, reached the staircase, and soon found himself breathing the fresh evening air at the gate of the villa.

"You are going away?" inquired the old servant.

"Yes," replied Zavilovski, and marched away rapidly, as if he ran away from some one. In a moment he halted, and said aloud: "Have I gone insane?" And suddenly it occurred to him that it was true, that he was fast losing his senses, that he perceived nothing, that he believed in nothing. Something seemed to have collapsed within him, or a wall had come down with a tremendous crash upon him. He was dazed. How's that? Could it be possible that, in a house which he thought was a temple of exceptional beings, the usual treachery built its nest, vanity and mire found refuge? Can it all be an infamous comedy! And his "own little swan" breathes that poisoned air!

And he recalled Osnovski's words: "God grant that you may find in Castelli such a wife like my own." "A thousand thanks!" thought Zavilovski, and unwillingly laughed in a dry, mirthless manner. Neither such vice nor such mire was new to him. He saw it, and he knew of its existence, but for the first time he discovered it in such a setting, and resolved mechanically, unwillingly, that Osnovski, who opened his heart to him as an honest man and an intimate friend, was a clown or a fool, because of his implicit faith in his wife. Osnovski, who wished him to be so happy with Castelli, as he was with Anette, was really comical. One cannot love to such extent as to see nothing, to believe blindly. Zavilovski's thoughts passed to Linetti. At the first moment he felt that from all that moral sloth and death in the house of Osnovski, a shadow fell also upon the young girl. But afterward he began to scourge himself for that profanation. He became indignant with himself. He longed to take her away from the society of Osnovski and her demoralizing influence; to seize her, and carry her away from the house wherein her innocent eyes could gaze upon vice, and become infected with the disease. True, a demon whispered into his ear that Osnovski also trusted his Anette as he his Linetti, that Osnovski was willing to shed his blood to prove the purity of his wife, but Zavilovski rejected these insinuations and said: "It is sufficient to look into her eyes." He remembered how he pressed her hand to his lips, and she said: "Speak to auntie."

Before his eyes appeared again the shocking scene, with Panni Osnovski and Kopovski as central figures, how the latter kneeled before her, and he asked himself time and again: what should he do, how should he act under the circumstances? Warn Osnovski? But this thought was rejected with indignation. To lure Panni Osnovski to a secluded corner, and there, face to face, read her a moral? But she would show him the door! To threaten Kopovski and demand his withdrawal from the house? But this was also inconvenient. Kopovski might take offense and challenge him to a duel. He resolved to bury the secret in his heart, and be silent. Besides, it was easy to conclude from the peculiar request

of Kopovski and her reply, that the evil was not carried too far. He knew but little of women, but he read a good deal about them, and knew that there were women for whom the form of temptation had more attraction than the crime itself; that is, women, void of moral sense, as well as of temperament, who have just as much lust for the forbidden fruit as they have repugnance for the downfall,—in short, such women who are not capable of loving any one, and deceive their husbands as well as their lovers. He remembered the words of a Frenchman: "If Eve had been a Polish woman, she would have plucked the apple from the tree, but would never have eaten it." Such a type seemed to him Panni Osnovski. Suddenly he recalled the words of Osnovski: that imbecile Kopovski was courting Castelli, that it enraged his wife, and she endeavored to turn Castelli's head by singing the praises of another man. Thus, Panni Osnovski took care of her own end. He shuddered; it became clear to him that if it was true, it signified that Kopovski hoped to succeed in his suit. And again a black shadow fell upon the pure white figure of Linetti. He stifled these doubts and fears, and called himself a fool for entertaining such thoughts. The best evidence that Linetti could not love Kopovski was her love for himself. He felt an instant relief, as if a great stone had fallen from his chest, and in his heart he began to ask the forgiveness of Linetti.

Passing by the house of Polanetzki, he met Polanetzki promenading with Panni Mashko. He held her arm in his, and they walked very slowly, as if conversing on some very serious subject. Zaviloski was amazed, and in his dazed mind another suspicion was added to the other. Polanetzki recognized him in the pale moonlight, and having no intention to evade him, he stopped Zavilovski.

"Good-evening," said he. "Home so early,—why?"

"I have been at Panni Bronich's, and am now wandering aimlessly, because the evening is so fine."

"Come in with us. I will take Panni Mashko home and return immediately. You have not seen Marinya for some time."

"Very well, I'll go in!"

And, indeed, he suddenly felt a desire to see Marinya.

He had experienced so much that day, that he was fagged out. He knew that her face, full of repose, acted like a balm to his nerves.

He rang the bell, and going in the lighted parlor he explained to Marinya that he came at the invitation of her husband.

"I am very, very glad!" replied Panni Polanetzki—"my husband went to see Panni Mashko home, but will return to tea. I also expect the Bigels, and perhaps even my father, if he has not gone to the theater."

She pointed to a chair at the table, and fixing the shade on the lamp, continued her work, at which Zavilovski found her. She was making bows from pink and blue ribbons, a little pile of which lay before her on the table.

—"What are you making?" asked Zavilovski.

—"Bows for dresses. But tell me, how are you? Do you know that the whole of Warsaw is marrying you to Linetti Castelli? You were seen with her at the theater, at the race track, at the promenades, and no one wants to believe that it is not all settled."

"I have always spoken candidly to you, and will therefore tell you now, that—it's almost settled."

"Ah, what agreeable news! God grant you happiness, which we both wish you with all our hearts."

"And she extended her hand, which he shook warmly, and then she asked:

"Have you spoken to Linetti?"

Zavilovski related his conversation with Castelli and Osnovski, and finally revealed all that was in his overflowing heart. How he scrutinized, criticised, fought with himself; how he tried to banish that thought from his head, or rather from his heart, but was conquered after all. He assured her, that many times he pledged himself to cut short the acquaintance, but he lacked the grit, for he felt, that the whole world, the whole object of life—was naught without Linetti, and he would not know what to do without her.

"Think ye," continued he—"other people have relations, mothers, sisters, brothers, but I, save my unfortunate father, have no one, and what wonder that all my love is centered on her?"

"So it ought to be."

"But it still appears to me a dream," resumed he with enthusiasm, "and I cannot become accustomed to the thought that she will be my wife. At times I fear that it cannot be, that something will happen which will ruin everything."

He became more and more excited. At last he trembled nervously and covered his eyes with his hands.

"You see," said he. "I must cover my eyes, to imagine everything, such luck, such good fortune! What does a man want in life and marriage? Just such happiness! But it surpasses my strength. I don't know. I may be extremely weak, but at times the contemplation of it fairly takes away my breath."

Panni Polanetzki put her work on the table, and covering it with her hands, gazed at Zavilovski.

"Because you are a poet, and are easily carried away by emotions. You must take things quietly. I have a little book left by my mother in which she, being seriously ill, inscribed all she considered good and enlightening. Among others, she wrote of marriage something I have never heard, or read in books: 'You marry not to be happy, but to fulfil all the duties conferred on you by God; happiness is supplementary, a gift of God.' You see how simple this is. Remember it and tell it to Linetti."

"It is indeed very simple. Such thoughts never appear to me," said Zavilovski, looking at her exultingly. Marinya smiled sadly, and taking up her work, repeated: "But still, you tell it to Linetti."

Listening to her, Zavilovski looked at her bent head, her flashing hands at work, and it seemed to him that the repose, the peace she spoke of so frequently, hovered about her, filled the air, hung over the table, burned in the lamp, and, at last, passed into himself. Soon Polanetzki returned, after him came the Bigels, who were followed by a man carrying Bigel's 'cello. At tea, Polanetzki spoke of Mashko. His work in contesting and annulling the will was coming to an end, though new difficulties arose every day. The lawyer, engaged by the charitable institutions—that young Seliodka (herring) which Mashko wished to pepper and devour—proved a hard fish to catch. Pola-

netzki heard that he was a cold and obstinate man, but very able and energetic.

"What is most amusing," said Polanetzki, "is the fact that Mashko considers himself a patrician who leads his followers against a plebeian, and declares that he's merely testing whose blood is the better. What a pity that Bukatzki is dead! This would be a source of genuine delight to him."

"And Mashko is still in St. Petersburg?" asked Bigel.

"He will return to-day. That is why his wife could not remain here for the rest of the evening. I was prejudiced against her," added he after a pause, "but now I am convinced that she is not at all bad, but a poor wretched woman."

—"Why is she poor? Her husband has not lost his case yet."

"Yes, but he's never home. Panni Mashko's mother is in Vienna, in an eye infirmary, and, I believe, will soon lose her sight entirely; she is home all day alone, like a daughter of the desert, and I pity her . . ."

"She has become much more sympathetic since her marriage," observed Panni Polanetzki.

"Yes," confirmed her husband, "and she has lost none of her charms at that. Before, her red eyes made her look a fright, but now that redness has disappeared and she looks chaste and virgin-like."

"It's doubtful whether Mashko is contented or can appreciate that chasteness," said Bigel.

Panni Polanetzki was eager to tell of the news of Zavilovski's decision, but as he was not formally betrothed yet, she was not certain that it would be proper to divulge the secret given her in confidence. But after tea, when Panni Bigel asked Zavilovski how his affairs were getting on, and he replied that the end was near, Marinya could not restrain herself any longer and wedged in the announcement that he was to be congratulated. They all shook his hand with such manifestations of sincere joy, that he was deeply touched. From sheer delight Bigel kissed his wife, and Polanetzki ordered champagne with which to drink the health of the newly betrothed. Panni

Bigel poked fun at Zavilovski, describing what housekeeping of a poet and a painter would look like. Zavilovski laughed, but was content that his dreams had assumed the appearance of reality.

A little later, drinking his health, Polanetzki said to Zavilovski: "Well, old boy, God grant you long life and happiness, and I will give you one bit of advice: Whatever poetry you have in your romantic soul, put it into your occupation, work diligently, be in life a realist, and remember that married life is not a roma—"

He did not finish, because his wife covered his mouth with her hand, and laughingly said:

"Silence, you old bear! Please, don't listen to him, and create no new theories, but only love, love, love!" added she, addressing Zavilovski.

"In such case, buy yourself a harp," said Polanetzki, teasing her.

At the mention of a harp, Bigel seized his 'cello and declared that they must wind up the evening with music. Marinya sat down at the piano, and they began to play Handel's serenade. Zavilovski felt as though his soul had left his body, filled with these tender notes and sounds, and made its flight through the night to lull to sleep his Linetti.

He reached home late that night, encouraged and invigorated by the society of these honest people.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MARINYA enjoyed the peace and tranquillity "God has sent to her." This partook to a great extent of that voice from "beyond the grave" that from the pages of a little yellow book said to her time and again: "We marry not to be happy, but to live up to the duties God has placed upon us." She often glanced at this little book and read its wise sayings, but the real meaning of these words she understood when she returned with her husband from Italy. At last she was not only reconciled to her fate, but she would not entertain the thought that she was unhappy. She often pondered with whom she could compare her husband, but failed to find his equal. Bigel was an honest man, but he swam in shallow waters. Osnovski, with all his natural kindness, lacked activity and the love for work. Mashko was from every point of view inferior to her husband. Zavilovski was more of a child-genius, than a man. In short, her Stach always came out victorious with colors flying, and the result that she had more faith in him, loved him more intensely every day. Limiting her own "ego," and sacrificing on his altar her dreams and her egoism, she felt that she became refined, more perfect, that she drew nearer to her Lord, that at last, in this consisted her whole world of happiness.

She often remained alone, reasoning with herself, as a simple honest woman: "people must strive to be good." It seemed natural to her that in her husband's eyes she had become less attractive. Often standing before the mirror and gazing wistfully at herself, she said: "The eyes have not changed, but the figure . . . the face—and were I Stach I should run away from home!"

She was greatly relieved and encouraged by the assurance of Panni Bigel, who insisted, that "after" she

would become prettier, and "just like a little girl." At times she rejoiced at the thought that nature arranged things so kindly, that though a woman at first is deprived of her charms and suffers a little she "afterwards" not only regains her former beauty, but she receives as a reward a little one that cements her husband's love and affection. At such moments she was perfectly happy and gay, and said to Panni Bigel: "Do you know what I think? It occurs to me that one can always be happy, provided he has the fear of God in his heart."

"What is there in common between God and one's happiness?" asked Panni Bigel, infected with her husband's philosophy.

"That," replied Marinya, "which prompts you to be content with what He gives you, not to anger Him with complaints about what He did not give us, though we wanted it so badly. But chiefly to be patient," added she, "and not annoy Him."

They both laughed.

Often in his anxiety, Polanetzki surrounded his wife with more proofs of his tenderness, which gave one the idea that he thought more of the welfare of his future child, than of his wife. But Marinya took no offense at that. Then, abandoning every day a particle of her egoism, she acquired more and more a peace that was reflected in her wonderful eyes. Now her mind was absorbed in the hope of giving birth to a daughter. She was afraid it would be a son, and in view of this once asked her husband:

"Will you not dislike me if it is a boy?"

"No," replied Polanetzki, "but I prefer a girl."

"Panni Bigel told me that all men mostly prefer to have boys."

"Well, I am not of that sort. I am a man who prefers little girls."

At times she was filled with alarm. She was afraid to die. And she prayed to God that He in His mercy would spare her young life, not only because she feared death, but she did not want to leave this world, even for the Kingdom of Heaven. Here she had the warm love of her Stach, who would be so sorely grieved to lose her. But

she had no grounds for alarm, for everything went well with her. Thanks to this reassuring feeling, Polanetzki was perfectly satisfied with the condition of his wife. If he was alarmed and uneasy, he had other reasons for it, which, fortunately, Marinya did not know, and which he himself did not dare to divulge. For some time his life accounts, in which he took such pride, showed a deficit. Only recently he considered his theories of life very sound, like a house built of stout timber on a stone foundation. He thought he was an expert builder, that his edifice was finished, and he could move in and live therein at peace with the rest of the world. But he forgot that the human soul was like a bird, that rose to a certain height, but could not rest suspended in the air, and was compelled to extend her wings to retain her balance, lest she be drawn downward. And the more powerful the temptation, the more he was angry at himself that he yielded to it. The walls of his house began to give way and sink. He did not yield to it willingly; the very thought that he contemplated it, angered him, for it led him to doubt the integrity of his own character. From time to time he cast a searching glance at Panni Osnovski and repeated in his soul the opinion of Confucius about women: "The average woman's brain is as big as that of a chicken, the exceptional woman has the brain of two chickens." At the sight of Panni Mashko, however, it occurred to him that this Chinese truth might for certain women serve as a flagrant flattery. But if Panni Mashko could be called absolutely stupid, this definition at least would constitute a feature of her individuality. A paltry few little formulas made her a respectable nonentity, just as three or four hundred words comprised the whole vocabulary of the inhabitants of New Guinea, and satisfied all their needs and conceptions. These formulas were sufficient for the reasoning capacity of Panni Mashko, for her life and friendly relations in society. She was, moreover, infinitely passive, with all her earnestness of an automaton, created by her absolute faith in the presumption that by clinging to certain conventional forms a person will always be in place in everything. She was the same when a girl, when he ridiculed her and called her "a heartless doll," when

there lay at her door the blame for the death of his friend, the physician, when he detested her. And yet, this almost dead-like face, that passiveness, indifference, that unearthly repose, that coldness of demeanor, that redness of her eyes, the slender outlines of her girlish figure—everything had a certain charm of its own,—attracted him. Then it happened that he who would not be a strop for the sharp razor-like blade of Panni Osnovski's tongue, who was a hundred times prettier than Panni Mashko, he who resisted the temptation of her Roman fantasies, he who considered himself a man of principles, of a strong character, sharper, keener than the rest—suddenly discovered that the building he took so much pains to erect was ready to crumble down at the first gentle kick of Panni Mashko's little foot, and fall on his head with a crushing force. Of course, he could not cease to love his wife—he was so deeply attached to her, but he felt capable of betraying her, himself, his principles, his moral conceptions, and everything else that guided a moral man on the straight and narrow path. He saw in himself not only a human beast, but a very weak little beast. He grew alarmed, indignant at this weakness, but he could not overcome it. He should have avoided Panni Mashko, and yet he invented new excuses to see her oftener. He could not gaze at her without being consumed by a mad desire to embrace her. He was tortured by a morbid, sickly curiosity as to how she would act should he confess to her his infatuation, lay bare to her the secret passion of his heart, that he unwillingly admired her, anticipating that even such a sudden confession would not disturb her cold serenity, nor diminish her passiveness. He almost despised himself, yet longed the more to possess her. He unearthed in himself whole mountains of depravity that he acquired during his long stay abroad. He could not understand that there existed such natural regulations or laws, owing to which the soul of a man despises such a woman, but the man-beast is enchanted by her glance, her smile. As to Panni Mashko, her womanly instinct took the place of foresight and penetration. She was no longer so artless as not to understand the meaning of his glances gliding over her figure, or what was

betrayed in those fiery eyes of his, when, during his conversation, they almost devoured her. She saw no danger in being thus singled out and admired, like the quail, hiding its head in the snow, when over it in the air circles the hawk. The mantle of respectability and good form served as snow to Panni Mashko, and Polanetzki was conscious of it. He knew from experience that women above all take care of the outer forms of moral conduct, often bordering on eccentricity. He remembered their indignation when he related some piquant anecdote in Polish, and their contented smiles when the same was repeated in French. Always and everywhere, if honesty and purity do not spring from the soul and inborn principles, the final downfall is only a question of time, for it depends solely on accident, on surroundings, on peculiar conceptions of propriety. The passion of Polanetzki, however, was curbed to a great extent by his affection for Marinya combined with his respect and solicitude for her present condition, by his hope of soon becoming a father, by the remembrance of the short time that had elapsed since their wedding, by natural honesty and religious feeling. All this was a barrier, that kept the man-beast at bay. But not always was his conduct the same. Once he almost betrayed himself. When he thought that Mashko was returning to Warsaw and he met his wife hurrying home to meet him, he suddenly became so envious, that he, with a suppressed but still apparent anger said :

"I understand your haste. Ulysses is returning, and that is why Penelope must be at home, but,——"

"But what!" asked Panni Mashko.

He had a desire to curse her, but, not thinking, he replied: "but to-night I would like very much to retain you a little longer."

"It's not convenient," said she curtly, through her teeth, in her thin voice.

In this "not convenient" her whole soul was laid bare! He returned home, cursing her and himself, and found in the light and cozy room Zavilovski and Marinya, who was trying to persuade the young poet that in marriage one need not seek visionary happiness, but duties to fulfill, prescribed by God himself as the principles of married life.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

—“WHAT’S Panni Osnovski to me and what do I care about her conduct?” grumbled Zavilovski, the following day, on his way to Panni Bronich. “I am not going to marry her, but my sweetheart! And why in the name of common-sense was I so alarmed, why did I torment myself?”

His next thought was, “what will Panni Bronich say?” In spite of Osnovski’s assurances and his own hope that the conversation would simply be a matter of form, which he must observe, in spite of his faith in Linetti and in the kindness of her “sweet” auntie, his “generous heart” trembled with fear. He found both ladies together, and encouraged by the events of yesterday, kissed the young girl’s hand. She blushed and stammered out: “I am going away!”

“Stay here, Linetti!” remonstrated the old lady.

—“No, I will go—I am afraid of him, and of you, auntie.”

She pressed her head to her aunt’s shoulder and fawning and fondling like a playful kitten, she added: “don’t you, aunt, do him any harm—pray, don’t!”

And glancing again at Zavilovski she went out. Zavilovski was agitated and pale. Panni Bronich’s eyes were moist with tears. Seeing that it was much easier for Zavilovski to burst into tears than to utter a word, she began:

“I know the object of your coming to me. . . . I have long noticed that there is something going on between you, my dear children. . . .”

Zavilovski seized both her hands and began to kiss them. She continued:

“Oh, I have experienced enough in my life, and I can

therefore feel with others. I will say even more: this is my specialty. Women live in the heart, and that is why they can see through it. I know that your affection for Linetti is sincere and profound. I am satisfied that if she loved you not, or if I should step in between you, you would not survive the blow."

And "auntie" looked at him scrutinizingly.

"Oh, I don't know what would become of me!" exclaimed Zavilovski.

"Now,—you see. I guessed as much. Oh, dear me. I will not be your evil genius, and will not stand in the way of your happiness. What better man could I find for my Linetti? Where is that 'better man,' who is worthy of her, who possesses all she loves and respects? I cannot see her married to a Kopovski, and will not permit it. Not for all the treasures of the world!"

Notwithstanding his agitation, Zavilovski was struck by the surprising energy of the old lady: listening to her rejection of Kopovski it seemed to him that he pleaded the cause of the former and not his own. In the meantime "auntie" who admired her own flowers of speech, harped on the same chord:

"No, not another word about Kopovski. You alone will be capable of making Linetti happy and give her what her dear innocent heart desires. I knew yesterday, that you would speak to me to-day, . . . and I could not shut my eyes the whole night long. And no wonder! The fate and fortune of my Linetti are at stake, and therefore I hesitated, I dreaded to-day's conversation, because I foresaw that I could not hold my ground against you, that you would carry me away by your noble feelings and eloquent pleading, just as you enchanted Linetti yesterday."

Zavilovski, who had scarcely uttered a word yesterday or to-day, was at a loss to recognize the power of his own eloquence, nor the time he actually gave an evidence of the same; but the old lady gave him no time to ponder, but continued.

"And do you know what I've done! Ah-ha! you see! The very same thing I have always done in the most serious moments of my life. After a brief talk with Linetti

last night, I went early this morning to my husband's grave in the cemetery. He was buried here in Warsaw. I don't remember whether I told you that he was the last of the Ruri—. Oh, yes I did. Oh, if you only knew what noble inspirations I carry away from the cemetery, and what a delightful asylum it is for me! Oh, my dear poor husband! You, as a man of deep emotions, true and sensitive, will surely understand me, how I prayed at his grave, how my whole soul was consumed by one question: "Shall I entrust Linetti to you or not?" She squeezed his hand and through tears added: "Do you know what my Theodor replied to me? 'Give her to him, make them happy!' and I gladly give her to you with my blessing."

A flood of tears interrupted her further speech-making. Zavilovski was on his knees. Linetti who at that moment suddenly returned to the room, as if by a pre-arranged signal, kneeled beside him, and Panni Bronich spread her hands over their heads, and almost crying, pronounced:

"She is yours! She is yours! She is given to you by myself and Theodor!"

The young people rose to their feet. Auntie covered her eyes with her handkerchief and stood as if benumbed. Then she gradually removed the mask, glanced at the betrothed couple and burst out laughing:

"Oh, dear me! oh, I know what you rogues now want! You want to be left alone! Well, you shall have your way! You want to speak to each other!" And she went out.

Zavilovski took the hands of Linetti and looked at her with rapture. Then they sat down. Linetti's hands still remained in his, her head was on his shoulder. It was a song without words. Zavilovski bent his head over her face. Linetti closed her eyes. He respected and loved her. He slightly pressed his lips to her blonde tresses. From this touch his head felt giddy as in a whirl, everything turned topsy-turvy and vanished from view. He forgot where he was, what he was doing, he only heard the beating of his own heart, the scent of the girl's silky curls, and it seemed that this comprised the whole world. This, however, was a dream of only a moment. The

awakening was near. Auntie slowly opened the door, as if bent on eavesdropping. At the same time the voices of the Osnovskis were heard, and in a twinkling, Linetti was seized and held fast in the clutches of her "sweet" auntie, then passed into the more gentle embraces of Panni Osnovski.

"Oh, what a joy in our house!" shouted Osnovski, tightly squeezing Zavilovski's hand, "we have all learned to love you . . . Can you imagine, Anette," he added, turning to his wife, "what I yesterday wished for Ignati? That he may be as happy with Linetti as we are, my darling." Osnovski passionately kissed his wife's hand.

Though unconscious of what was going on around him, Zavilovski collected his wits and looked up, puzzled, at Panni Osnovski. She withdrew her hand, and said merrily:

"No, Yuzia, they will be much happier, because Linetti is not so thoughtless, not so volatile a woman as your wife, and Pan Zavilovski will never kiss her hands in the presence of others. Let go, Yuzia!"

"First let him love as I love you, my treasure," was the beaming husband's reply.

Zavilovski did not appear at his desk that day, but remained with Panni Bronich. After breakfast, Zavilovski, his betrothed, and her aunt, who was eager to parade with the engaged couple before the world, went driving through the park. It was neither a successful nor a pleasant trip, owing to the sudden rain that drove away the promenaders. On their return home Osnovski divulged the details of a new plan.

"Pritulovo will not run away from us," explained he to old Panni Bronich, "it is like being in a village, and as we have spent the whole of June here, we might just as well spend two or three days more. It would be a good idea to give an engagement party to a few invited guests. I will undertake the arrangements. Do you like the idea, auntie? I see that our lovers have nothing against it. Ignati will certainly be delighted to see his dearest friends on his engagement night, as for instance, the Polanetzakis, the Bigels—though the latter are not on our calling list, but this matters little. To-morrow we

will pay them a visit, and matters will arrange themselves splendidly. Are you in favor of it, aunt, and you, Ignati?"

Ignati was, as the saying goes, in the seventh heaven. As to "auntie" she hesitated, probably because she did not know the late Theodor's opinion on the subject. He would have to be interrogated, but she remembered that from his last resting-place he said: "Give her away!" His consent could not consistently be doubted. After dinner arrived Kopovski the daily visitor. He did not betray great joy at the announcement of the betrothal. On the contrary, he stood a few moments as if petrified, and finally muttered: "I—I never expected that Panna Linetti would marry Zavilovski."

Osnovski struck Zavilovski with his elbow, winked his right eye, and making a roguish grimace, whispered:

"Did you notice? I told you yesterday that he is over ears in love with Linetti."

Zavilovski departed late that night from Osnovski's villa. On his return home, instead of making jingling rhymes, he wrote letters and balanced accounts,—a task he should have performed during the day,—though he felt like a harp, the strings of which sounded and played of their own accord.

This new evidence of the man's probity touched everybody. Bigel, when he visited the Osnovskis, after the latter's formal call, remarked to Panni Bronich:

"You have certainly long appreciated the creative talent of Zavilovski, but you scarcely know what a noble man he is. I say it because men like him are very rare. The other day, when he spent the day in your house, he came late to the office, requested the watchman to admit him, took home with him books and letters, and during the night completed the work he should have performed in the daytime. It is agreeable to think, that you have dealings with a man who is so perfectly reliable and trustworthy."

Panni Bronich replied dryly to this lavish praise:

"I hope that in the future Pan Zavilovski will get a position more befitting his abilities."

The general impression was, on either side, not of the best. True, the Bigels took a fancy to Linetti, but,

departing from the Osnovskis, Bigel whispered to his wife : " what luxury ! How well these people live ! " What he meant was that the air of this villa was that of an incessant holiday, or a continuous festival. After their departure, Panni Bronich said to her niece : " Yes, yes. . . . They seem to be nice respectable people. . . . excellent people. . . . I am sure of it . . . Yes, yes."

She did not, however, finish her thought, which was unnecessary.

The young girl evidently understood her, for she answered.

" Yes, but they are not his relations."

In a few days word came from his relatives. Zavilovski, who in spite of Panni Bronich's persuasions, had not apologized to old Zavilovski, received from the latter a letter containing the following :

" Pan Cat ! You scratched me most unreasonably ! I had no intention, whatsoever, of insulting you. And that I always say what I mean, ought to be forgiven me, because—I am an old man. You no doubt have already been informed that I call your bride, a Venetian little devil. But whoever suspected that you were in love or intended to marry her ! I only heard of it yesterday, and now I understand why you have shown your claws. I personally prefer bold men to obstinate men, but cannot, owing to my devilish gout, come to you myself and congratulate you. You must therefore come yourself to the old man, who wishes you more than you suppose."

Ignati went to see him that same day. He was received very cordially, and though the old man grumbled and grunted, as usual, yet he was so sincere, that Ignati not only began to like him, but to recognize in him a genuine relative.

" May God and the Holy Virgin bless you ! " said the old man. " I know you very little, my boy, but I've heard so much about you, that I wish the same good report were made of all Zavilovskis."

And he shook Ignati's hand. Then he turned to his daughter and added : " Ah. A genial beast, isn't he ? Yes ? . . . Well, and how's Theodor ? He did not queer you !—eh ? " inquired the old man on parting.

Ignati, the poet, was highly gifted with a fine sense of humor, and, naturally, Theodor, that very prominent corpse, appeared to him extremely comical. He laughed merrily and replied:

"No, on the contrary. Theodor was with me through thick and thin."

The old man shook his head:

"Yes, he is a devilishly particular, accurate man, is Theodor. You must look sharp and be wide-awake with him, my lad, for he's an old dog!"

Panni Bronich had the greatest respect for the wealth and social position of old Zavilovski. This, in a degree, explained her call on the old man the following day, and her almost hysterical gratitude for his cordial reception of Ignati. But the old nobleman suddenly became angry, and shouted:

"Do you presume I am a dreamer, a make-believe man? You have often heard me declare that poor relatives are a scourge, but do you think I lay the blame at their door? No! You don't know me yet! Every petty nobleman, as soon as he loses or squanders his fortune, in most cases becomes an idler, a scamp. Such are our characters, or, rather, our lack of it. But this Ignati is a different man, entirely: everybody has a good word for him, and, though he's a poor devil, I like him, I do, indeed!"

"I, too, love him dearly . . . I hope you will come to the engagement party?"

"*O'est décidé*. I will be there, if I have to be brought on a stretcher."

Panni Bronich returned home, beaming.

In the evening when Zavilovski came, she said to him:

"Do not wonder that I put my nose into everything. I am your mother . . . I am awfully interested in your selection of a ring for Linetti. I hope it will be a pretty one? There will be so many guests at the engagement. Besides, you have no conception, what a dear little girl this is . . . She is æsthetic even in trifles. She is gifted with a unique taste. What a taste, oh, oh!"

"My desire was," replied Zavilovski, "to get a ring

with three gems, the colors of the stones to signify faith, hope and love, because she is my faith, my hope and my love."

"A brilliant idea! Have you spoken about it to Linetti? Do you know what? It would be just lovely to have a pearl set in the centre, to signify that she is a pearl. Symbols are in fashion now. I believe I told you that Pan Svirski, when she was under his instruction, called her a pearl? Yes, I did! You don't know Svirski? He is also—Osnoyski told me that he is due here to-day or to-morrow.—And so, sapphire, ruby and in the centre a pearl. Oh, yes, Svirski, is also,—Will you be present at the funeral?"

—"At whose funeral?"

—"Bukatzki's. Yuzia said that Svirski brought his corpse."

—"I have never known nor seen Bukatzki in my life."

"So much the better. Linetti prefers that you should not know him. God grant forgiveness to his sinful soul—he never sympathized with me, and Linetti could not bear him . . . But the little girl will be delighted to receive that ring, and if she is, so am I."

And the "little girl" was not only delighted with the ring, but with life in general. The rôle of a betrothed woman had for her a certain irresistible charm. Sitting, hand-in-hand, in the twilight, or in the beautiful evenings, in the pale shimmer of the moon, leaning her little head on Zavilovski, like a dove, they gazed for hours at the trembling leaves, at the myriads of stars. In that half-consciousness, half dream, they lost the sensation of actual existence, and were conscious only of happiness.

Zavilovski realized that in such moments the heart melts in a pantheism of love and throbs with the same joy that gives life to everything that can love, which joins the hearts of mankind and constitutes a bliss so infinite that if it were to last longer, it could annihilate the human mind. However, being an idealist, he admitted that when death finally comes and cleanses the human spirit of outside, trivial matter, such minutes become an eternity. Those were as the skies, in which there was nothing mysterious, but everything was combined in one complete harmony.

Linetti, though she could not soar as high as his thoughts, nevertheless felt as in a whirl, a dizziness, she was intoxicated and happy.

A woman, though not able to love like a man, loves to be loved, in consequence of which she passes the threshold of betrothal and feels grateful to the lover who opens before her a new horizon of life.

Linetti was led to believe that she loved him, until at last she was firmly convinced of it.

Once Zamilovski asked her whether she was sure of her heart.

—"Oh, yes," said she, extending to him both her hands, "now I know whom I love!"

And he pressed those hands to his lips with reverence, at the same time he saw cause for alarm in her words and inquired:

"Why only now? Has there been a moment when you feared you could not love me?"

Castelli looked up at him with her blue eyes, meditated a second, then smiling, said:

"No, but I am such a coward, and therefore trembled. I understand that to love you is different from loving any one else."

She laughed and added:

"With Kopovski it would have been simply *comme bonjour*, but with you! . . . Perhaps I cannot express myself very well, but it always seemed to me that it was like ascending some steep mountain or tower, and when you reach the very summit, you have a view of the whole world, but until you have reached that height you must walk and climb, climb and walk, but I am so lazy."

Zamilovski stood erect, and with all the dignity he could assume, he uttered:

"Well, when my dear lazy little girl gets tired climbing, I will take her in my arms and carry her to the loftiest height."

—"And I will press myself so closely to you, that the burden will not be so heavy," replied Linetti, shrugging her shoulders and imitating a child.

Zamilovski kneeled at her feet and kissed the end of her dress.

CHAPTER XXIX.

SVIRSKI arrived with the body of Bukatzki, and on the following day called upon the Polanetzki. He found only Marinya; her husband had made a short trip into the country to inspect a dwelling billed for sale. Svirski found her greatly changed, and could scarcely recognize her. But as he had learned to love her in Rome, her appearance touched him. However, after a few minutes, conversation, she appeared to him so beautiful in her halo of future maternity, that, comparing her mentally with many "primitives" of various Italian schools of art, he was loud in his enthusiastic admiration of her. He laughed at her eccentricities, but he cheered her broken spirits, and she was genuinely glad at his arrival, not only because she sympathized with his vigorous and healthy nature, but she felt certain he would give expression to the same admiration in the presence of her husband, and that she would gain in the eyes of the latter. She detained him for quite a time, but Polanetzki returned late in the evening. Zavilovski came in the meantime, wishing to pour out into some sympathetic ear his overflowing heart. He was a frequent guest at the Polanetzki mansion. Svirski and Zavilovski, after a first formal introduction, measured each other with cautious glances, like men who, above all, abhor pretensions, but nevertheless rapidly become intimate, noticing that they each were plain, true-hearted men. But Marinya gently broke the ice, and introduced Zavilovski as the betrothed of Castelli—an old acquaintance of Svirski.

"Ah!" exclaimed Svirski. "I knew her very well! She was my pupil."

And he warmly shook Zavilovski's hand, adding: "Your bride has Titian hair. She's a little too tall, but

so are you. You can't find another pose of head like hers. You must have noticed that there is something swan-like in her movements. I called her 'the swan.'"

Zavilovski smiled so naïvely, so gaily, like a man who listened to the praise of an object he loved best. He said, with a shade of pride: "La Perla? Do you remember?"

Svirski looked up at him with surprise.

"In Madrid there is a painting by Raphael," replied he. "It is among the treasures in the Museum del Prado. Where did you hear that name, 'La Perla'?"

"I think I heard it from Panni Bronich," responded Zavilovski, confusedly.

"Yes, it may be. There was a copy of that painting in my studio,—my own work, in fact."

Zavilovski, with the thought firmly planted in his mind that one ought to be cautious in repeating the words of Panni Bronich, began to take leave of his hostess. He wished to spend the evening with his fiancée. Svirski left soon after. He left with Marinya the address of his studio in Warsaw, and requested that Polanetzki should call on him soon for consultation in regard to the arrangements for the funeral.

Early the following morning Polanetzki went in search of the artist's studio. It resembled a glass pavilion, which, like a swallow's nest, clung to the roof of one of these huge, many-storied buildings. Access to it was gained through winding stairs, as to a belfry. The artist apparently enjoyed here full freedom, for the doors were wide open, and as Polanetzki slowly climbed up the stairs, he heard the dull clang of iron, and a bass voice that sang:

The air is warm with the breath of spring,
And the trees are all in full bloom;
But I constantly sing of one thing,
Knowing no grief, nor sadness or gloom.
I sing that I may shed tears nevermore:
That I cease thee forever to love and adore.

"Good!" reflected Polanetzki, halting to gain his breath. "A splendid bass! But whence that abominable noise?"

Climbing up a little higher, and reaching a small ante-room, he perceived the cause of the noise. Svirski, in a sweater that outlined finely his Herculean chest and his strong arms, was wielding a pair of iron weights.

"Oh! How are you!" exclaimed Svirski noticing his visitor and dropping his weights.— "Pardon my attire; as you see, I was exercising a little. I called on you yesterday, but found you not in. I've brought our poor Bukatzki with me? Have you prepared the little palace for him?"

"The grave has been dug these last two weeks," replied Polanetzki, shaking hands with the artist. "There is even a cross there, if I am not mistaken. . . . I heartily welcome you back to Warsaw. . . . My wife told me that the body is at Povanzki?"

"Yes, it is in the church vaults. To-morrow we'll bury it."

"Very well. I will to-day notify the guests and our friends. By the way, how is our Professor Vaskovski getting along?"

"He wished to write to you, but the heat drove him from Rome, and do you know whither he went? To the youngest of the Aryans. He told me that the journey would last two months. He wants to convince himself how much they are prepared to accept his historical mission. He went to Ancona and Fiume, and thence farther on."

"Poor man! I am afraid he will meet with new disappointments there."

"Perhaps! People laugh at his ideas. To tell the truth I know not how much adaptibility for inception of his idea the youngest of the Aryans possesses, but the idea itself is so unusually Christian, so truthful, that one must be a Vaskovski to come to father it. You will allow me to dress, I hope. The weather is so warm here, like in Italy, that it's best to do one's gymnastic feats in a light blouse."

"But it's best not to do it at all during such scorching heat."

Polanetzki gazed with admiration on his athletic form. "However," added he, "you could pose for money."

"Why? oh, those muscles of mine! Look at these hands, they are my vanity. Bukatzki said that I painted like an idiot, but no one will dare to tell me, that I cannot lift two hundred, three hundred pounds with one hand, or fail once out of ten straight shots with the revolver."

—"And such a man cannot transmit his strength, his muscles to a progeny?"

—"What would you do! I am afraid of an ungrateful heart, upon my honor, I am! Find me another woman like your wife, and I will not hesitate a moment. But what shall I wish you, a boy or a girl?"

—"A girl, a girl! afterward, there may come a son, but now I want a daughter."

"God grant her a safe delivery. Your wife is a healthy woman, and all fears are groundless."

"Yes, but she has changed terribly, don't you think so?"

"Yes, but she is entirely different now. What an expression! A true real Botticelli! Upon my honor! Do you remember his painting in the villa Borgeza? Madonna col Bambino e Angeli. There is in that painting the head of an angel, somewhat bent and adorned with lilies:—just the very image of your wife,—the same expression. Yesterday it attracted my attention the moment I saw her, and I became agitated. . . ."

Svirski hid behind the curtain to dress.

"You ask me," continued he, from behind the curtain—"why I don't marry? Do you know why? Bukatzki often told me that I had a sharp tongue and powerful muscles, but a woman's heart. But if I had a wife like you have and she were in a similar condition, I really don't know what I should have done with her? Kneel at her feet, salaam to her with my head, put her in a corner and worship her like the image of a saint.—I really don't know."

Polanetzki laughed.

"Aha!" replied he "this is all very well before the wedding. Then the very fact of being accustomed to it, stems the overflow of feeling and sentimentality."

"I don't know, maybe I am so foolish."

"Do you know what? When my Marinya gets over it, she will find you a good wife, like herself."

"It's a bargain!" yelled Svirski from behind the cur-

tain. "Verbum! I will give myself into her pretty hands, and if she says: 'Marry!' I will get married with my eyes closed."

And coming out from behind the curtain without a coat he repeated: "I am willing! I am willing! All jokes aside: If she will only consent to take that trouble."

—"Oh, women love this! If you could have witnessed to what length Panni Osnovski went to marry Zavilovski to Castelli! Marinya also assisted her as much as I permitted her to. That is woman's most favorite pastime."

—"Yesterday I made the acquaintance in your house of that Zavilovski. A very nice chap and, apparently, quite a genius. It is sufficient to glance at him. What a profile, what a feminine forehead and a bold face! And though his hipbones are too large, and his knees are badly jointed, his head is a beauty!"

—"This is our Benjamin, and he is everybody's pet in the office.—Besides, he is a very honest man."

"Ah! he is one of your office attachés? I thought he was one of those rich Zavilovskis, whom I met abroad. I encountered one, a rich old man—an original——"

—"He is the old man's relative, but has not a copper to his name."

Svirski laughed.

—"Of course! Of course!" continued he, "I know old Zavilovski with his only daughter—millionaire heiress! Not a bad little figure, that girl! She was courted in Florence and in Rome by several ruined princes, but the old man came out flat, that he would not sanction his daughter's marriage to an Italian, because they are 'the worst race.' And imagine, he considers ours the first race in the world, and among us, in the first place, the Zavilovskis, I presume. Sometime ago he made the following assertion: 'Let them say whatever they please. I have traveled the wide world over, and how many of those Germans, Italians, Britons, and Frenchmen shined my boots! . . . But, I will never shine shoes for any man in the world!'"

—"A good old man!" laughingly replied Polanetzki, "this shining of shoes he considers not a question of social position of certain people, but a social characteristic."

—"Yes, it seems to him that the Lord created some 'nations' to shine the boots of a petty nobleman from beyond Kutna, when the latter takes a trip abroad. Well, and how does he look upon his relative's match? He always called the Bronich family 'small fry.'"

—"Perhaps he's indignant. But he only recently became acquainted with 'our' man. They never saw each other before, because 'our' man is very proud and would not for all the riches of the world bow to the old man, or try to initiate himself into his graces."

—"All praise due him for that! If he only marries well . . . because. . . ."

"What? You know the girl?"

"Yes; I know Castelli, but have no idea whatever of girls. Bah! Had I known them, I could never have lived forty years a bachelor! They are all nice, and I like them all. But a few of those that I liked, I saw again after they were married, and I lost all confidence in them. And this angers me, because I think of getting married some day myself. If so, what do I know? I know one thing, that each and every one of the dear creatures wears a corset, but what sort of a heart is throbbing beneath it only God knows. I also loved Castelli, but then I have loved all women I met in my life. This last one I loved more than the rest of them."

—"And you never thought of marrying her?"

"I did think of it, but then I had neither money, nor fame, like I am blessed with now. Then I was only beginning to crawl into society, to acquire my little fortune, and you know that such people are always cowards. I feared that the Bronich household would make a sour face, and as I was not certain of the young girl's heart, I let her alone."

"Zavilovski has no money either."

"He has popularity, and old Zavilovski, who is immensely rich, and this counts for a good deal. Who has not heard of the old man? Besides, to be frank, I did not like the Bronichs, and I waved my hand at them, and gave them up."

They spoke for a while about the Bronichs, Castelli, the late Bukatzki and his propensity to sharpen his wit

at other people's expense, and finally parted. Polanetzki went from Svirski to the priests, consulted with them and perfected all arrangements for the morrow's funeral. The religious ceremony took place in Rome, in view of which Polanetzki invited only a few priests, with whose prayers he wished to mingle his own. He was prompted by an old affection and a recent feeling of gratitude for Bukatzki, who bequeathed him a considerable part of his fortune.

Besides the Polanetzkis the funeral was attended, by the Mashkos, the Osnovskis, the Bigels, Svirski, Plavitski and Panni Chavastovska. It was a beautiful summer day. The cemetery looked entirely different than it did the day of Polanetzki's last visit. It was clad in verdure; and in places seemed a forest, filled with gloom and shadow. On some monuments trembled a network of sunbeams, penetrating through the leaves. Some of the crosses in the depths of this forest seemed to slumber over the cold graves. There was a vast number of small birds in the leafage, which filled the air with their twitter, mellow and soft, as if they were afraid to awaken the sleeping men and women beneath the soil. Svirski, Mashko, Polanetzki and Osnovski took the casket with the remains of Bukatzki and carried it to the sarcophagus. The priests in their white robes, gleaming in the sun, marched in front, after them silently followed the young ladies, dressed in mourning. This procession advanced along the shaded walks slowly, quietly, without sobs or tears; all were serious and grave like the shadows from the trees falling upon the monuments. Still there was in all that scene a certain sad poetry which could have been felt and appreciated only by such a sensitive nature as Bukatzki's. They reached the vault built in the shape of a sarcophagus above the ground, for Bukatzki declared when alive, that he did not want to lie in a damp vault. The casket was easily and softly pushed in through the iron door, the ladies began to pray, and a minute later Bukatzki was left to the solitude of the cemetery, the whispering trees, the twittering birds, and to the mercy of God.

Panni Chavastovska and the Polanetzkis went to the grave of Lida, the rest waited outside in the carriages, for this was the wish of Panni Osnovski. On their return,

she invited them all to the engagement party of Zavilovski, and then to Pritulovo, their summer residence.

Svirski took his seat with Panni Chavastovska in the carriage of the Polanetzkis, and after a long pause, as if bringing his thoughts and impressions in harmony, said gloomily : " How strange ! To-day we attended a funeral, to-morrow we shall all be present at an engagement, what love plants, death reaps—is this our life ? "

CHAPTER XXX.

ZAVILOVSKI expressed the wish to be betrothed in the presence of only their immediate family. This was seconded by Linetti, the ceremony was performed in the afternoon, when the guests began to arrive. The newly engaged felt at ease, and received their visitors as bride and groom. She found her rôle of bride very charming, and at the same time, she was conscious that it enhanced her beauty to a great extent. There was something aerial in her tall figure; to-day her eyes were not drooping, as if she were sleeping, but were bright, there was a smile on her lips, and her cheeks were flushed. She looked so beautiful, that when Svirski beheld her, he could not help sighing and thinking of his "paradise lost." This sad mood was dissipated only when he remembered his favorite tune:

" I sing that I may shed tears never more :
That I cease thee forever to love or adore."

Every one was struck by her beauty. Old Zavilovski who was carried on his easy-chair into the parlor, took Linetti's hands and looked at her for some time. Then turning to his daughter, said:

"That such a 'Venetian little devil' could turn the head of a poet, there is nothing surprising, because in their heads, people say, the wind freely blows." Then he turned to the groom and inquired smilingly: "To-day you will not wring my neck off for calling her 'a Venetian devil'?"

Young Zavilovski laughed, and bending his head, kissed the old man's shoulder.

—"No, to-day I could wring no one's neck."

—"God bless you, and the Holy Mother of God!"

said the old man, elated at the proof of such respect and love of his relative, and began to feel with his hand in his chair. He finally found a jewel case, and giving it to Linetti added: "This is from the house of Zavilovski. God grant you to wear it many long years!"

Linetti opened the jewel case, in which, on blue velvet, rested a diamond brooch. Again the old man repeated: "From the house of Zavilovski." But no one listened to him. All eyes were fixed on the diamond, the ladies held their breath in admiration.

"It's not a question of diamonds," exclaimed Panni Bronich almost falling in the arms of old Zavilovski, and interrupting the reigning silence—"but what a gift, such a heart."

"Drop it! Leave me in peace!" the old man replied, as though defending himself.

After that the little company divided itself in still smaller groups. The betrothed were wrapped in each other. It seemed as if no one existed for them now.

Osnovski and Svirski approached Panni Polanetzki and Panni Bigel. Kopovski entertained the hostess—Panni Osnovski, and Polanetzki amused Panni Mashko. Mashko himself was apparently interested in the old Cræsus, for he barricaded him with chairs so that no one could come near him, and engaged him in conversation about olden and modern times—the pet theme of the old man. Mashko was so clever that he agreed with him in all his views. Mashko, among other things, explained to him that everything must ultimately change in this world—the nobility as well as the masses.

"I, my dear sir," said Mashko, "am a follower of hereditary instincts of that rôle, which leads a man back to the soil where he was born, but being a landowner myself, I am a lawyer at the same time, only on this principle, we must have our men even in this branch of usefulness, or we shall be at the mercy of people originating from other spheres and often prejudiced against us. Credit is due to our countrymen, that they, at least, the majority of them, understand this very well, and prefer to trust me with their legal affairs, in preference to others, and some even deem it their duty."

—"We have had men in our midst in judicial institutions," replied old Zavilovzki. "As to other branches, I really cannot see how a nobleman can help himself. I have often heard the idea advocated that we ought to grasp everything, to shun nothing; but people forget that it is not the grasping that's hard,—it's the making good use of it. Show me one that acquired a fortune through this."

"There is a good illustration before your eyes. Take Polanetzki, for instance, that man made a considerable fortune, as a partner in a commission house, and everything he owns he has in cash; he can produce it to-morrow, every cent of it. He will not deny that my advice was often beneficial to him, that everything he possesses he owes to his deal in grain."

"Allow me, allow me!" replied Zavilovski looking at Polanetzki—"he did, indeed, amass a fortune. So! . . . If he descends from the real Polanetzkis, he comes from good old stock."

"And that stout brunette—is the artist Svirski."

"I know him from abroad. The Svirskis were also good people. At any rate he earns a lot, but he is not wealthy."

"Why not? Not one of the largest Podolian estates yields so much income, as his aquarelles."

"What's that?"

"Pictures painted with water colors."

"Not even in oil? Well, then, that relative of mine may next become rich on those poems of his. Let him write, let him write. I will not be against it. Many noblemen were poets. But they are not in question now. You say, times are changing? Hem! . . . let them change—only for the better."

"The main thing," said Mashko, "is not to conceal one's abilities in one's head, nor capital in the safes. Whoever does it sins against the community."

"I beg your pardon, how am I to understand this? In your opinion I have no right to keep my capital under lock and key, but must open my safe to thieves and ruffians?"

Mashko smiled with an air of superiority, and, putting his hands on the back of the chair, replied:

"This is not what I mean, my dear sir!"

And Mashko began to explain to Zavilovski the principles of political economy. The old nobleman listened, and shook his head, repeating:

"Yes, this is something new! But I managed to get along without it."

Panni Bironich looked at the betrothed couple with apparent emotion, telling Plavitska (who in turn looked at Panni Osnovski with oily eyes), of her youth, her life with Theodor and their misery, caused by the untimely arrival in the world of their only offspring. Plavitska listened to her distractedly. Finally she became so affected by her own story that she said amid tears:

"Thus all my love, my hope and confidence is in Linetti. You will understand it because you have a daughter."

At the same time but in another corner of the parlor Vírski chatted with Marinya.

"Who is that Perugini—that pale woman, to whom your husband is talking so earnestly?"

"This is our acquaintance, Panni Mashko. Have you not been introduced to her?"

"On the contrary I made her acquaintance yesterday at the funeral, but I forgot her name. All I know is that she's the wife of that man who is now speaking to old Pavilovski. A real Vannuci that woman! the same quietism, the same yellowness, but her features are lovely."

And he looked at her more attentively and added:

"True her face is dull, lifeless, but the outline of the whole figure is remarkable. She seems thin, but look at her back and her shoulders."

But this did not interest Panni Polanetzki; she looked at her husband, and on her face a look of alarm appeared, for at that moment Polanetzki bent down to Panni Mashko and spoke to her of something Marinya could not hear. It occurred to her that he gazed into Panni Mashko's pale face and dull eyes with the same look he bestowed upon her during their bridal trip. Oh, she remembered well that glance! And her heart beat fast, as if she foresaw some danger. Still she thought: "It cannot be, this is unworthy of my Stach." She could not help following

them with her eyes, to see how animated Polanetzki was in his conversation, how indifferent Panni Mashko. "And why these foolish thoughts," mused Marinya, "he speaks as is his wont, with ardor, and no more."

Her doubts were furthermore dispelled by Svirski, who either did not notice her uneasiness, or did not understand the real expression of Polanetzki's face at that moment; and said:

"But why is she silent? Can't she talk at all? Of course your husband is compelled to keep up the conversation, and it looks as if he was bored, even angered." In a moment Marinya's face became clear and beaming.—"You are right," said she—"he is really bored, and as soon as he gets in that mood, he becomes angry." And she became of merry mood again. Now she would even give a brooch like the one old Zavilovski gave Linetti, to have her husband at her side, whispering to her a few kind words.

This desire was realized in a few minutes. Pan Osnovski engaged Panni Mashko in conversation, and Polanetzki rose, said a few words, when passing by her, to Panni Osnovska who spoke to Kopovski, and finally sat down beside his wife.

"You wish to tell me something?" asked he.

"What a coincidence, Stach," replied Marinya, "only a moment ago I called you in my thought, and you seemed to hear it, for you came."

—"You see what a considerate husband I am!" replied Polanetzki, smilingly—"but this is very simple. I noticed that you were alone, that you looked at me. I grew alarmed, thought you felt bad, and came."

—"I looked at you, because I feel lonely without you."

"That is just why I came. Well, how do you feel? Tell me the truth: maybe you want to return home?"

—"No, I feel very well, indeed. I talked with Pan Svirski of Panni Mashko, and spent the time splendidly."

—"I am afraid that you misjudged her. That artist declared himself that he has an evil tongue."

—"On the contrary," protested Svirski,—"this time I was only admiring her figure. There will come a time for the evil tongue, too."

"And Panni Osnovski declared her figure to be hideous, which merely proves the opposite. But, let me, Marinya, tell you something of Panni Osnovski." And Polanetzki bent down to the ear of his wife and whispered: "Do you know what I overheard when going to you a moment ago?"

"Something funny, I know."

"Depends how you look at it. I heard Kopovski addressing her 'thou.'"

"Stach!"

"That is just what he said to her. 'Thou art always the same.'"

"Perhaps he repeated another person's words."

"I don't know . . . maybe . . . But they were in love with each other once upon a time."

"But, Stach, are you not ashamed?"

"You had better tell them that, or rather Panni Osnovski."

Marinya knew very well of the existence of perfidy, but considered it a vague French looking theory. She did not expect that one could come upon it in every step in real practical life. In view of this she began to scan Panni Osnovski with astonishment. She was too honest, however, to believe at once in the existence of this evil. She could not agree that there was anything wrong in the relations of these two, if only because of the stupidity of Kopovski. Nevertheless it struck her that they led quite a lively conversation.

In the mean time these two, seated between a large flower-pot and the piano, not only chatted, but quarreled for over a quarter of an hour. When Polanetzki passed them, after dropping a few words to Panni Osnovski, the latter said alarmingly:

"I think he overheard us. You are always so careless."

— "Well, here you are again! I am always guilty of something. And who is always repeating: 'Anette, be cautious!'"

In this regard they were worthy of each other. Kopovski owing to his stupidity could foresee nothing. He was incautious to a high degree. Two persons already knew their secret, others could guess it, and Osnovski

must be blind indeed, not to perceive the frivolous shortcomings of his wife. But this is just what she relied on.

— “No, I assure you, he heard nothing,” said Kopovski, looking at Polanetzki, and resuming the conversation in French, he said :

“If you loved me, you would act differently. It’s because you don’t love me that you take no pains, that’s all the same to you.”

— “Whether I love you or not, but with Castelli — never ! Do you understand ? Never ! I prefer any other woman, but not her. And if you really loved me, you would not think of marrying.”

— “Nor would I, were you different to me than you are.”

— “Patientez !”

— “Yes, till death ! If I could marry Linetti, we would always be near each other.”

— “I repeat : Never !”

— “But why ?”

— “You will not understand this. And at last, Castelli is betrothed, and it’s foolish to waste time in useless arguments.”

“It was by your advice that I feigned love for her, that I pretended to court her and proposed to her, and now you have nothing but rebuke for me. At first I thought of nothing, then I grew to like her. I won’t deny it. She is liked by everybody, besides she’s a good match.”

Panni Osnovski clutched her handkerchief in her fist.

— “And you dare to tell me face to face that you like her.” She flamed up — “At last make your choice — she or I !”

“Of course you, but I can’t marry you, while I could marry Linetti. I saw that she liked me.”

— “If you knew women but a little, you would be grateful to me that I did not allow you to marry her. You don’t know her. She is like a match, and very mean at that. Do you mean to say that you did not perceive my motive in making you court her was to deceive Yuzia and the rest ? Otherwise how could you explain your daily visits to our house ?”

— “This I would understand, if you were different to me.”

"In such case, do not hinder me in my work. You see yourself, how well I managed that your portrait should not be finished, which gives you an excuse to come to Pritulovo. Later on there will arrive in Pritulovo a relative of Yuzia. Stephanie Ratkovska. Do you understand? You must, again, pretend to be in love, and I will attend to Yuzia . . . Thus, you can remain a long time in Pritulovo . . . I've already written to Ratkovska. She's not pretty, but she's a very nice girl."

"Always pretend and pretend! And the reward — is nothing. . . ."

"Listen. I am consumed by a desire to tell you! don't come!"

— "Anette!"

"Well, then, be prudent and patient. I can not long be angry with you. Now go to Panni Mashko and entertain her for a while."

Kopovski went away followed by the eyes of Panni Osnovski, who was apparently angry, but at the same time sympathized with him. He was very handsome, with his dark complexion and white cravat; she could not sufficiently admire him. Though Linetti was already betrothed to another, Panni Osnovski was still haunted by the thought that her rival could not only take possession of him as a husband, but as a lover. Telling Kopovski that she would prefer any other woman than Linetti, she spoke the truth. It was a question of her weakness to that feeble-minded Endymion and to her own vanity, in a word, her "nerves" did not agree with it. A certain esthetic love which she deemed the most supreme species and its origin her Grecian nature, took the place in her of fine moral sense and pure conscience. Owing to this caprice she fell under the influence of Kopovski's beauty, but possessing a fiery head and a cold temperament, she preferred — as Zavilovski justly guessed it — to play with evil rather than the evil itself. At the same time clinging to the rule: "If not I — then no one," she was ready to go to extremes in order to prevent his marriage to Linetti. She was firmly convinced that the latter, notwithstanding her words of contempt, her sarcastic remarks about his beauty—gave utterance to witticisms which

betrayed her affection for the man she tried to belittle. Above all Panni Osnovski wished to vanquish her rival, and in this she succeeded admirably through the aid of Zavilovski. She knew that the young girl, empty-hearted and shallow-minded, would be unable to resist the temptation of marrying a man with an illustrious name. Thus she saved Kopovski for herself. Besides she arranged a brilliant spectacle, which all women love to see, who thirst for more impressions than powerful sensations. She triumphed; everything went according to her wishes. Kopovski alone irritated her. She thought he was her property, and yet she made the sudden and unexpected discovery, that, stupid as he was, he understood that Osnovski could not hinder him loving Linetti, that in short, two were better than one. This upset all her calculations. It enraged her and she began to plan revenge. In the meantime she rejoiced that Linetti, for the time being at least, was, seemingly, genuinely in love with her Zavilovski, which for Kopovski appeared incomprehensible.

Her meditations were interrupted by an invitation to supper. Osnovski, to whom the words of Zavilovski about married life appeared a very apt expression of his own feelings on the subject, had the unfortunate temerity to repeat at supper, in offering a toast, his old-time wish that Zavilovski might live as happily with Linetti as he with his beloved Anette.

Unwillingly the eyes of Zavilovski and Polanetzki turned to the charming hostess, who cast a quick searching glance at Polanetzki, and the doubts of both were shattered at that moment. She was convinced that Polanetzki heard her conversation with Kopovski; Polanetzki that Kopovski was not repeating another's words when he addressed her "thou." The thought that Polanetzki spoke to Marinya about it enhanced her lust for vengeance. She became distracted, heard not the various toasts offered by her husband, Zavilovski, Plavitzki and Bigel. After supper she resolved to have dancing, and Yuzia, obedient as usual, gave the plan the warmest support. Being of merry mood he declared it was time for Ignati to have Linetti in his embrace, "because up to this moment he had never enjoyed that rare bliss."

Zavilovski, however, could not avail himself of the golden opportunity, for he had not the least idea of dancing, which surprised Panna Bronich and Linetti most disagreeably. Kopovski was an excellent dancer and set off with the heroine of the night—Linetti. They formed a beautiful couple, and the eyes of all turned unwillingly upon them. Zavilovski saw her light head leaning on her partner's shoulder, saw their breasts touch; saw them both dancing in time to Bigel's music; combined their motions and gliding steps into harmony, as if melting into one perfect figure. He was angry, for he recognized that there was something he could not do, something that would attach her to others, and part her from him. To fill his bitter cup, every one around him admired the stately pair. "What a handsome man!" said Zavilovski. "If there existed genius of the masculine sex, as there are of the female, he could serve as such in the female paradise of Mahomet."

They waltzed on, and in the music of that waltz as in their movements there was such an intoxicating languidness that it irritated Zavilovski and recalled to his mind the cynical, but truthful, verse of Byron about the waltz. At last he said to himself with impatience: "When will that jackass let Linetti go?"

That "jackass" finally released his hold of Linetti and offered his hand to Panni Osnovski. Linetti sat down at the side of her fiancé and said: "He dances lovely and likes to brag of it. . . . Poor fellow, he has very little else to be proud of. Evidently I am awfully tired, and my heart is beating fast. I wish you would put your hand and feel it, but this is inconvenient in the presence of others. . . . However, how strange this is! I now belong to you entirely."

—"Yes, you are mine," replied Zavilovski, extending his hand. "But for Heaven's sake, Linetti, to-day of all days you must not address me 'You.'"

"Yes, I am your property," whispered she, and did not push his hand away.

—"I envied him," said Zavilovski, passionately squeezing her fingers.

"Maybe you do not want me to dance any more?"

though I do love it dearly, yet I prefer to remain with you. . . ."

"Oh, my adored one! . . ."

"Though I am a foolish, worldly girl, yet I wish to be worthy of you. . . . You see, I love music; . . . even waltzes and polkas affect me greatly. But how well that Bigel plays! Of course I know that there are better things than waltzes. Hold the handkerchief a minute, and release my hand. It is your hand, but I need it to arrange my hair. . . . There is nothing bad in dancing after all, but if you object to it, I shall not dance. I am an obedient creature. I will learn to read your wishes in your eyes and then be like the water that reflects the clouds and the rainy weather. I feel so good when at your side. . . . See how well they dance."

Zavilovski had not sufficient words to express his gratitude. In the meantime she pointed to Polanetzki, who danced with Panni Mashko.

"He really dances better than Kopovski," said she with shining eyes—"and how light, how stately he is! I would like to have one dance with him, if you will allow it!"

"Oh, as much as you please, my darling, my treasure," replied Zavilovski, who was not a bit jealous of Polanetzki. "I will send him to you myself."

—"Ah, how well they dance, how well! They simply glide, swim and make my body shudder."

The same opinion was shared by Panni Polanetzki, who, following with her eyes the dancing couple, felt a greater chagrin than Zavilovski felt a moment previous. I occurred to her several times that her husband looked at Panni Mashko with the same glance that attracted her attention when Svirski first observed that Polanetzki was either bored or angry. From time to time the dancers glided by her and she saw distinctly how his hand embraced her waist, how his breath touched her neck, how his nostrils dilated, and how his glances glided over her decolette bosom. All this could escape the observation of others, but not so with Marinya, who read his face as a book. And suddenly the light of the lamp grew dim in her eyes. She understood that there was a great difference between happiness and unhappiness. But this did not

last long, not more than a minute, during which her heart was oppressed and ceased throbbing. Before her seemed to lift a curtain, from behind which was visible the whole poverty of human nature, the whole sham of life. Naturally, nothing had actually happened yet, but Panni Polanetzki was staggered by the hideous thought that there might come a moment when her confidence in her husband would vanish like smoke. She endeavored to get rid of her tormenting doubts, and said to herself that he was under the influence of the dance and not the dancer. She refused to believe her own eyes. She was ashamed of her Stach, of whom she had been proud until this moment; she struggled with her feelings, knowing full well that from this insignificant and sudden suspicion great misunderstandings might arise which would cast their shadows upon her future life.

At this moment was heard the voice of Panni Osnovski near her, saying:

"Ah, Marinya, it is evident that your husband and Panni Mashko were created to waltz with each other all their life. What a pair!"

"Ye-es," uttered Marinya.

"Were I in your place," continued Panni Osnovski, "I should be extremely jealous. And are you not? No? I will be frank, and tell you that I am a jealous woman. At least, I have been. I know that Yuzia loves me, but men in general, even if they love us, have their fantasies. Their heads do not ache from that, but our hearts do, though they see it not."

Marinya's eyes were all that time intently fixed on her husband, who escorted Panni Mashko to a seat and invited Linetti to dance. From Marinya's heart a heavy load fell away. It was the dance he loved, not the dancer. Her suspicions began to pale, and she accused herself of undue haste in judging. In the meantime Panni Osnovski continued: "Do you know how I discover when Yuzia begins to flirt?"

"How?"

"Let me teach you a valuable lesson. As soon as a man's conscience is not clear, he begins to suspect others, in order to distract attention from his own misdeeds.

This is their method. They are all liars, the best of them."

With these words and the fullest conviction that she made a good move, she went away, leaving in Marinya's head a veritable chaos. A physical exhaustion overcame her, which grew in intensity every moment. The suspicion, Osnovski's hints, Kopovski's addressing the host "thou," and to add to it all, the storm that raged outside, and the dancing couples that whirled past her, inside,—what a chaos of impression, what a torture!

—"No, I must be sick," mentally repeated she. She wanted to go home, but the storm outside increased in fury. Home, home! Ah, if her Stach would speak to her one caressing, kind word, her heart would grow light! "How tired I am!" she thought time and again with a pang.

Polanetzki finally came to her. At the sight of her pale face, all the sympathy of which he was capable of expressing was felt in his words:

—"My poor girl," said he, "time for you to retire, if only the rain would cease. Are you afraid of a storm?"

—"No, sit down near me."

—"How sleepy you are!"

—"Maybe I should not have come here. I need rest."

—"The devil take all these dances," said he, as if following his own thoughts. "I'd rather sit at home and take care of my own girl."

This was said in a sincere tone, and it relieved her. She felt at ease.

—"When you are with me," said she, "I do not feel so tired. A moment ago I felt very bad indeed. Anette was at my side, but what good is in that? When a person is sick, they want some loved one near them. It may sound strange here, at a party, in the presence of strangers, . . . so long after the wedding, . . . but I can't help saying it, that I want you at my side, that I love you. Yes, I love you so dearly."

"And I love you, my darling," replied Polanetzki, who at that moment understood that his love to her could be pure and calm.

The storm ended, only streaks of lightning flashing through the skies. A quarter of an hour later the weather cleared up entirely; the guests began to take leave. Only one, Zavilovski, remained, wishing to bid his bride good-by unseen by others. Polanetzki ordered the coachman to drive slowly, and Marinya, tired and sleepy, sank into the arms of her husband. At first she wanted to put him to the test, to ask questions, but soon dismissed the idea, saying to herself: "I will tell him nothing. Never a word!" At last weariness of mind and body overcame her, and when the carriage reached the house she was fast asleep in her husband's arms. At the same time Zavilovski and Linetti went out from the parlor to breathe the fragrant air of the garden. The skies were all aglow with myriads of twinkling stars, and, after the rain, seemed to smile, as if through tears. They stood silent for some time, then Zavilovski took her hand, on which sparkled the engagement ring, and said:

"No matter how long I gaze upon this ring, my sweetheart, I cannot believe my own eyes. It seems to me all like a beautiful dream, and I dare not think that you are really mine."

Linetti put her hand in his, that the rings might touch, and dreamily replied:

"Yes, there is no longer Linetti, but simply your bride. How strange that in a mere ring there should be such a sacred power."

Zavilovski's heart melted with happiness.

"Because," said he, "in the ring there is a soul that is given to you, and takes another in exchange. And this golden link stands for all that's best in man: I desire, I love, I promise!"

"Yes, I desire, I love, and I promise," like an echo repeated the young girl.

He embraced her, and, pressing her to his heart, began to take his leave. Carried away by the power of love and the yearning of his soul, his farewell was like a religious adoration. He kissed the hands that gave him so much happiness, the eyes that looked at him with so much mutuality, that little head so dear to him.

Linetti and her aunt remained alone in the room.

"Are you tired, my child?" asked the old lady, looking at Linetti, who was awaking as if from a dream.

"Alas, aunt! I am now coming back from the stars . . . and that is such a long, long way!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

ZAVILOVSKI could say now that even for poets will occasionally shine a bright star. From the moment of his engagement to Linetti, he often pondered the question, where to get means to cover the expenses of the wedding and to furnish a house. Being in love, he had no clear conception of such things, and imagined this to be a new obstacle in life which must be conquered. But as he had already overcome many difficulties, he now depended on his own strength and decision to win in this matter. But how? This question did not worry him.

Others worried for him. Old Zavilovski, notwithstanding his recognition of genius, believed that the head of every poet was full of nonsense; he nevertheless invited Polanetzki to consult with him and said:

"I tell you candidly, I like this fellow. His father was a good-for-nothing, lazy man, who only knew about cards, women and horses. But God has punished him. The young man did not follow in his steps, but has kept up the good name of the family. My other relatives are not much to my liking, but this fellow, if God will grant me to live much longer, I will never forget, and would even now like to help him out. True, he is only a distant relative, but he bears my name, and that is important."

"We also have thought about it, but do not know how to help him. You cannot mention the subject to him, he is so ambitious and would refuse help. You would lose patience with him."

"O, he is a proud fellow!" exclaimed Zavilovski with evident self-satisfaction.

"Yes, he was employed in our establishment as book-keeper and correspondent and I took a great fancy to him, and together with Bigel offered him a loan of a few

thousand to fix up a house, which he could return to us from his salary, in the course of three years. But he refused, saying that his affianced will accommodate herself to his circumstances. Osnovski also wanted to offer his services but we dissuaded him, knowing that he will not accept."

"Perhaps he has his own."

"He has, and has not. It came to our knowledge lately that his mother left him a few thousand and the income from this money he devotes to the support of his father, who is in an insane asylum; he will not touch the principal. Before he entered our employ, he suffered from poverty, almost on the verge of starvation, but would not take a penny from the fund. Such is his character, and that is why we respect him. It seems he now expects to realize something from his writings; and with this he intends to defray the expenses of the wedding. Possibly so! His name is now well known."

"This is mere speculation. No matter how famous he may be, mere speculation."

"Don't say so. But it is far off and long to wait."

"Perhaps he is only ceremonious with you because you are a stranger, but I am a relative."

"We may be strangers but know him longer and better than you," answered Polanetzki, shaking his head.

Zavilovski frowned and looked dissatisfied. For the first time in his life he had to trouble himself how to give away money and whether it would be accepted. It worried and at the same time pleased him. He remembered, but did not tell Polanetzki, how many times he had to pay the notes of this young man's father, and what notes! and now the apple fell so far from the tree!

"Well," said he, "God wills it so. The young generation has changed so much, that even the devil has nothing to offer in the way of temptation."

His face brightened. Optimistic by nature, his heart was now full of merry thoughts.

"Just think of him, firm as a rock.—Rascal, able and industrious, and such character."

Saying this, he shook his head and pursing his lips as if to whistle, added:

"Just think of it, this is a nobleman! By Heaven, I did not expect it."

"It seems there is no other way," said Polanetzki, "and his affianced will have to get used to him."

But the old man looked displeased.

"That is all very well," answered he, "but will she or will she not accustom herself. Who knows her? So long as the engagement lasts she will be satisfied, but for how long? Besides there is an aunt. I personally respect people who make their own fortune, but not upstarts, who affect to be accustomed to palaces and luxuries. Others again," pointing to his daughter, "would consent to live in a garret, if she promised. Look at Bronich. Both he and his wife were shallow people, and the girl was brought up in their school. Neither you nor Ignati know them well."

"I do not know them at all, but have heard different opinions in regard to them; but, for the sake of Ignati, I would like to know more of them."

"I have known them for some time, but still do not know them well. Judging from what Panni Bronich says, they are religious women, and so virtuous that they ought to be canonized while living. You see there are women who fear God and strictly follow his commandments, and there are such who make sport out of their faith, and these are the kind that grow and blossom."

"You are right," said Polanetzki, laughing.

"Is it not true? I have seen many in my days. But let us turn to our subject again. Can you not think of some way in which this wild cat will accept help from me."

Helena Zavilovski who was absorbed in her embroidery work, as though she had not heard a word of their conversation, raised her head and looked at them with her steel-cold eyes.

"There is a way, and a very simple one," she interposed.

—"You don't mean to say you have found one!" said the old nobleman with fine scorn.

—"What is it?"

"Plain enough. Put a snug sum in the bank for Ignati's father."

—“This won't do. I've done enough for his father, and I never wish to see him. What I want now is to do something for Ignati himself.”

“But if you will provide for the father, the son will be able to use the legacy left him by his mother.”

“To be sure, that is true, now you see neither of us could devise a plan, while she easily found a way.”

“You are indeed right,” said Polanetzki, and he looked at her with great curiosity, but she bent her head to her work.

The news of this turn of affairs greatly pleased Panni Polanetzki and the Bigels and awakened an interest in Helena Zavilovski. It was said of her, that she was cold and unapproachable, but it was discovered that beneath this coldness there was hidden a tragedy that had changed this society woman into a queer being, and took her from the world and its pleasures. Some praised her philanthropy, but few really knew that she was charitable. Men argued that in her manners there was an expression of contempt, as if she could not forgive them the fact that she remained a spinster.

Young Zavilovski took a trip to Pritulovo and returned within a week after this conversation took place between Polanetzki and old Zavilovski. As soon as he found that the old nobleman had deposited, in the name of his father, a sum twice the amount of his own legacy, he rushed to thank him and to refuse the gift; but the old man was on firm ground and at once stopped him.

“How does this concern you? I did not do it for you. What right have you to accept or refuse? if I want to help my sick relative, that is my affair.”

To this argument there could be no reply. The interview ended with embraces, and both, until now strangers, felt truly related to each other. Even Helena appeared favorable to Ignati; and to the old man, who often secretly wished he had a son, he became strongly attached. A week later Panni Bronich came to Warsaw and called on the old man. Speaking about the young couple, she mentioned several times that her Linetti was marrying a poor man, the result of which was that the old man lost patience and exclaimed:

“What are you talking about! God alone knows who

made a better match, your niece or Ignati, financially as well as in other respects."

Panni Bronich was not offended by this remark; on the contrary, her attention was attracted by the word "financial," and her imagination stretched the meaning of it. She thereupon visited the Polanetzki and told them that the old man formally promised to give Ignati an estate in Prussia; at the same time she confessed that she loved the young man with the same motherly feeling that she had for Leila, and finally expressed her conviction that her Theodor would have loved him as well, and that both could have borne more easily the loss of Leila.

Young Zavilovski knew nothing about this or about the imaginary Prussian estate, or the fact that he took Leila's place. He only noticed that the conduct of people toward him began to change. Information about the estate spread over the city with lightning speed, his acquaintances saluted him altogether different and his colleagues in the office were no longer familiar with him. Returning from Pritulovo, he visited the people who were present at the engagement party, and the rapidity with which his visit was returned by Mashko evidenced the change in his relations with the outer world; for Mashko from the beginning of their acquaintance had looked down upon him. True, even now, he acted in a patronizing way, but his manner showed a more friendly familiarity. Zavilovski, although very artless, was perfectly intelligent, and knew that all this was affectation.

"It is queer," he wondered, "why this clever fellow played such a disgusting role?"

He mentioned the matter to Polanetzki.

"What concerns this Mashko," remarked Polanetzki, "is that he knows you are marrying a girl reputed to be rich, knows that you are friendly with old Zavilovski and perhaps through you may come in contact with him. Mashko thinks about his future, for that matter of invalidating the will is based upon very poor grounds."

As a matter of fact the young attorney who defended the interests of the institutions in whose benefit the will was made, showed great skill and energy.

With this the talk about Mashko was concluded. Panni

Polanetzki asked Zavilovski about Pritulovo and its inhabitants, and this was an endless source of conversation for the young man. He described the estate with its shady gardens, its sunny lakes, the paths lined with lime trees and the lawns planted with willows, the hazel bush, and further on the pine forest. Before the mind of Marinya rose her native Kremen and she felt homesick. She thought of asking her husband to take her to Vontori, to that little church where she was baptized, where her mother was buried. Perhaps Polanetzki also thought about Kremen, for he waved his hand and remarked:

"The country is monotonous. I remember Bukatzki said that he would passionately love the country on condition that it possess 'a good cook, a big library, handsome women and not to stay longer than two days in the year.' I can quite understand him."

"However," answered Marinya, "even you wanted to own a small piece of ground in the suburbs."

"Yes, but only to avoid spending the summer with the Bigels as we have to do this year."

"When I find myself in the country," remarked Zavilovski, "I have a desire to farm. My betrothed does not like the city, she is an artist. To me nature has certain charms. Linetti points out objects to me which I myself would never observe. Two days ago, when we were in the woods, she showed me a fern in the sun, and it was very beautiful. She told me pine trees have a violet coloring in the evening. She called my attention to flowers which I never saw and like an enchantress shows me a new world."

Polanetzki thought this was merely the fashion, the imaginary love of art which all young ladies adopt, not for sake of art or nature, but for the sake of attraction, evidence of a desire to exhibit culture and an artistic soul. But he kept his thoughts to himself. Zavilovski continued:

"She also loves the country children and thinks they are fine types. In fair weather we are always out and are both sunburned. We play tennis and are making great progress in the game. Osnovski also plays, and what a splendid man he is."

Polanetzki had learned the game while in Belgium, and boasted of his knowledge.

"Sorry I was not there, for I could teach you how to play."

"Teach me, perhaps, but not the Osnovskis; they all play well, especially Kopovski."

"How! is Kopovski in Pritulovo?"

"Yes," answered the young man.

They looked at each other and guessed, in a moment, what was in each other's thoughts. There followed a minute of silence, disagreeable to both. Marinya blushed, not being able to hide her excitement. Zavilovski, who thought he alone knew the secret, seeing her blush, became confused, and trying to overcome his perplexity, rapidly began:

"Yes, Kopovski is in Pritulovo. Osnovski invited him to please Linetti, who wishes to finish his portrait; she will soon have no time for it. There is now on a visit there a young girl, Panna Ratkovska, to whose heart Kopovski is laying siege in a vigorous manner. In August we will all leave for Scheveninger. If old Zavilovski had not come to the aid of my father, I certainly could not afford that trip, but now I may freely dispose of my money as I like."

He spoke to Polanetzki about his position in the latter's office, and asked for a vacation of several months, as he did not wish to lose the position altogether. He soon took leave of the Polanetzkis, and went home to write a letter to his bride. In two days more he would see her again, but meanwhile he deluged her with letters.

When Zavilovski departed, Polanetzki said to his wife: "Have you noticed that Zavilovski either knows or suspects something? There can be no doubt now. Poor blind Osnovski!"

"This very blindness ought to save her, to keep her on the straight road," observed Marinya. "It would be horrible!"

"—Noble natures pay for confidence with gratitude, treacherous natures with contempt and perfidy."

CHAPTER XXXII.

THESE words relieved and encouraged Marinya. Surely her husband could not utter them if he were capable of betraying her confidence. She therefore thought calmly of living in the neighborhood of Panni Mashko. The latter, of course, living with her mother, will be a frequent visitor in the adjoining villa of the Bigels, which the Polanetzki's intended to share that summer. Mashko would not allow his wife to spend the summer in Kremen. He loved her too well, and found in her his only comfort in his tribulations. Hard times were ahead for the ambitious lawyer. Though the contest of the Ploshovski will was not a failure, yet it became complicated more and more, and the numerous creditors of Mashko began to murmur. His adversary, the young legal celebrity, Seliodka, was not content with spreading evil news concerning Mashko's affairs, but had some of them appear in print. A struggle of life and death had begun between the two. The result was doubtful, but meanwhile Mashko did not fare well; his credit diminished, the popular confidence in him was shaken. Again a feverish hunt for money began. Naturally, the annulling of the testament could save him, but for this time was needed. In the meantime the snapping threads had to be tied together—a very difficult, humiliating, and painful task. At last matters reached such a turn that, two weeks after Polanetzki removed his little household to Bigel's villa, Mashko was compelled to ask from Polanetzki a "friendly favor"—to indorse a note for several thousand roubles. Polanetzki was a generous man, but had his own theories, that advised caution in financial matters. He refused to indorse the note, but instead treated Mashko to some of his views on the subject.

"With me it is a matter of principle; I never indorse notes. I can see no benefit in it for you or myself. I would rather offer you my personal aid in cold cash, if you are temporarily embarrassed, but not ruined. As it is, I prefer to reserve my services for some future occasion."

—"In other words," dryly responded Mashko, "you are holding out a faint hope of support in case I am declared bankrupt?"

—"No, this means that if a catastrophe cannot be averted, by taking my money, you will have a chance to start out again in life with the small capital. Now you'll drop it, like so much paper in the fire, without a profit to you, with a loss to myself."

They returned to their wives. Both were angry: Mashko because he asked favors, Polanetzki because he refused to grant them. This mood was intensified in the latter when he compared his own wife with that of Mashko. To the great chagrin of the lawyer, nothing gave him the right to expect the birth of an heir, and his wife retained all the girlish grace of her slender form. And now, dressed in her new suit, she looked beside Marinya, not only like a young girl, but much younger. Polanetzki thought he had lost his infatuation for Panni Mashko, but now he realized that he was mistaken, that, thanks to the proximity of their residences, they would see each other frequently, and he would soon become a prey to her charms. However, his love for his wife became warmer and more cordial. When Mashko left, Marinya noticed their cold parting, and was bold enough to ask her husband the reason. Polanetzki was always adverse to discussing "business" with his wife, but made an exception in this case.

"I refused to comply with Mashko's request," said he, "and, to tell the truth, I regret it now. Though he has some prospects of saving himself, yet his condition is such that he might stumble and fall before he reaches his goal. We have never been friends, and I almost detest him; he irritates and annoys me; nevertheless, life brings us constantly together, and he once did me a great service. I paid him in the same coin, but he's in trouble again."

Marinya listened to him with ill-concealed pleasure. She thought that if her husband was indeed fascinated by Panni Mashko, he would not have refused to lend Mashko the paltry sum. She was sorry for Mashko.

—"Do you suppose it would all be lost?" she asked timidly.

—"Maybe, and maybe not. But I can refuse," he added, not without pride. "Bigel is much softer."

—"Do not say it. You are very kind yourself, and the best proof of it is the fact that you feel bad about it."

—"Naturally it is not very pleasant to contemplate that even a stranger is struggling, like a fish on the ice, for the lack of a few thousand roubles. I understand his troubles. Mashko must make several payments to-morrow. He hunted for money high and low, but cautiously, so as not to cause suspicion, not to frighten his creditors, and as a last resource counted on me. He cannot settle these claims to-morrow. He will probably be able to raise the necessary sum in a few days, but in the meantime his reputation for punctuality will be tarnished, and being in close quarters, he may lose everything."

—"Is it very difficult for you to assist him?"

—"To tell the truth, no. I have my check-book with me; I brought it to be ready for any emergency—to give deposit on the purchase of a villa, if I find one to suit."

And he laughed.

—"You seem to be infected with a sympathy for your old admirer," added he.

She also laughed. She was glad to see the face of her husband clear, but nodding her head in the negative, she replied:

"No! not sympathy for the admirer . . . but a hasty egoism. I think that a few thousands are not worth spoiling my Stach's temper."

—"You're very kind, however," said Polanetzki, patting his wife's head. "In such case you decide: one, two, three! to give?"

But the young woman, like a spoiled child, closed her eyes, which meant the affirmative, and both became gay. Polanetzki pretended to grumble:

"That's what it means to be under a wife's heel! To

go now at night and beg Mashko that he might be so good as to accept the check, because such is the wish of a spoiled child."

"Are you going at once?"

"Of course! Mashko leaves for the city at eight in the morning."

"Then order the sulky to be ready for you."

"No, it's not necessary. It is not far, and it's very pleasant walking in the moonlight. I shall make it on foot."

He took tender leave of his wife, pocketed his check-book and departed.

"Marinya is too soft," thought he. "She is such a dear little creature that if a man intended to commit a crime, the very thought of her would stay his hand. Such wives are rare in this world."

Absorbed in his thoughts he reached the villa of Mashko, through the windows of which a light was seen, that was reflected like a huge lantern on the dark background of the forest. Passing through the gate, into the courtyard, he espied through the window both Mashkos—husband and wife, sitting on a low sofa. Before the sofa was a small table, holding a lamp. Mashko was sitting, with one arm around his wife's waist, with the other holding her hand, which he pressed to his lips, as if he was thanking her; suddenly he embraced her, drew her to his breast and began passionately to kiss her lips, her eyes. She did not return these caresses but sat motionless and cold, like a form without flesh and blood. At that moment in Polanetzki was awakened all the savage instincts of a primitive man, who, at the sight of a woman in the arms of another, is seized with a fit of violent rage, is on the verge of attacking and slaying his rival. With that desire was associated a feeling of envy, so untamable, that he who a moment ago reasoned that only an honest love for a woman constitutes true happiness, would now trample this very happiness under foot, would deprive Mashko of it, and catch in his own arms that slender figure, and lavish upon that cold, marble-like face, his violently passionate, fiery kisses.

Without giving the matter another thought he sprang to the door and feverishly pulled the bell-rope. When

the servant opened the door, he requested to be announced, and in the meantime tried to collect his thoughts and rivet his attention on the object of his errand. In a moment Mashko came out, his face betraying his astonishment.

"Pardon my late call," said Polanetzki. "My wife grumbled at my refusal to grant your request, and I came to arrange that matter, knowing that you will be leaving early to-morrow morning."

"Come in, come in!" replied he. "My wife has not retired yet."

He led the way into the room, through the window of which Polanetzki saw them. Panni Mashko, sitting in the same position, held a paper-cutter and a book, which she apparently had just taken from the table. Her passive face was calm, but it bore the mark of recent kisses: the lips were moist, and the eyes misty. The blood fairly boiled in Polanetzki's veins, and in spite of all his efforts to preserve his calmness, he squeezed her hand with such force, that she almost screamed with pain. At the moment he touched her hand a shiver ran through his body from head to heels.

"We both have received a scolding," began Mashko, "you for refusing to do a favor, and I for asking it. You have a good wife, but mine is not bad. Your wife defended me, mine defended you. I disclosed to her my embarrassment, and she reproached me for not making a clean breast of it before. Naturally, she did not treat me like a prosecuting attorney does a criminal, because she has no conception of his methods, but at the end she concluded that you were right in refusing me the assistance requested. She further insisted, that if the creditors must have their security, she was willing to give all she possessed. At the very moment of your arrival I was thanking her."

He put his hand on Polanetzki's shoulder:

"Do you know, my dear boy," he continued, "what I am going to tell you? I will admit that your wife is the best woman in the world, on the condition that you will agree that my wife is not a bit worse. If you knew her, as I do, you would not be surprised at this declaration."

Polanetzki, notwithstanding his mad desire to storm and conquer the heart of Panni Mashko, did not believe her capable of making self-sacrifices, moreover, of being guilty of noble conceptions, and in view of this mused: "She is either a good, honest woman, after all, and I am sorely mistaken, or Mashko deceives her into believing his embarrassment temporary, and her position brilliant." And he said aloud:

"I am a very punctual man in business, but how can you suppose for a moment that I would demand your property or security? I refused more from sheer laziness. I hate to go to Warsaw for the money. In summer people generally become lazy and egoistical. . . . It's a trifle, and to people like your husband, always busy with his legal matters, it can happen every day. Very often men must borrow various sums merely because they could not get their own money back in time."

"That's just what happened to me!" said Mashko, delighted that Polanetzki put the matter in such a light before his wife.

"I never dabble in business, and therefore know very little of it," replied she, "at all events, pray accept my thanks."

Polanetzki laughed and added:

"At least, of what use would your indorsement be to me? Let's imagine, for argument's sake, that you are bankrupt, we can safely imagine it, because you are not in danger of it. Can you picture yourself being the defendant in a suit wherein the plaintiff would strive to rob you of your income?"

—"No," replied the young woman.

Polanetzki kissed her hand in true gallant fashion, but in that act there was so much passion that no confession uttered in words could have imparted more of his feelings. She did not wish to betray her insight in the matter, but she understood very well that the favor was done her husband, but the passion of the kiss was meant for herself. She long ago had made the startling discovery that Polanetzki was infatuated with her, that he was excited in her presence, but being neither too delicate nor honest, she did not feel insulted. If anything, it pleased her vanity

to a very great extent. It excited her curiosity and satisfied her shallowness. True, her instinct warned her that it was a bold insolent man who could go too far, and this thought filled her with horror, but since this had not occurred, the very horror was not devoid of a certain charm for her.

—"Mamna always spoke of you as of a man who could be trusted," said she.

"I hope you share your mother's opinion about me," replied Polanetzki.

"Well, you may exchange your little confidences," jokingly interposed Mashko. "I will go into my room, prepare all necessary papers, and we'll settle the matter."

Polanetzki and Panni Mashko were left alone. For a moment a shadow of embarrassment and confusion overcast her placid face, and she tried to conceal it, adjusting the shade of the lamp, while he drew nearer and began excitedly:

"I will be very happy, if you share your mother's opinion of me. I am very much devoted to you and would like to enjoy your friendship. May I count upon it?"

"Yes."

"Thank you."

He extended his hand, she did not dare to refuse it. He took her hand in his, and not only kissed it, but seemed to be ready to swallow her entirely. His eyes grew dim. Another moment, and he would press to his heart the long coveted being, but in the adjoining room were heard the approaching steps of Mashko.

"My husband is coming," she quickly muttered.

The door opened, and Mashko said:

"Come, follow me, Polanetzki. And you,"—turning to his wife—"order tea to be served; we shall not be away long."

The transaction took very little time. Polanetzki signed a check, and it was all over, but Mashko, offering him a cigar, asked him to sit down, as he wished to have a chat.

"Again I am over head in trouble," said he, "but I will find a way out. Until lately I had business with large creditors only. Now I must see that the sun dries

the dew, and furnishes me with a new source of credit or a new income to help me bring the work to a successful end."

Polanetzki, indignant at his pretensions, carelessly listened to his words, and impatiently bit his cigar. Suddenly a mean, hasty thought flashed through his mind: If Mashko is ruined, his wife would be an easy prey. He inquired dryly:

"Have you thought of what you are going to do in case you lose your case?"

—"I will not lose it," replied Mashko.

"Everything is possible, you know it very well."

"I do not want to think of it."

"But you must. In that case, what are you going to do?"

Mashko put his hands on his knees, and fixing his gaze on the floor, replied gloomily:

"In that event I will be compelled to bid farewell to Warsaw."

A moment of silence ensued. The face of the lawyer became dark and cloudy, he reflected, and finally said: "Some time ago I made the acquaintance of Baron Hirsch. We met frequently and once participated in an affair of honor. At times, when doubts get the best of me, I think of him: to all appearances he retired from active operations, but he has many affairs on hand, especially in the East. I know people that have amassed fortunes working under him, because there is a wide field open for every one in his employ."

"So you intend to appeal to him?"

—"Yes, but I can also blow my brains out."

But Polanetzki did not hear that earnest threat. From the conversation he gleaned the following facts: that Mashko, in spite of his self-confidence, feared a possible crash, and that he had a plan ready for that emergency; a visionary one perhaps. Before joining his wife Mashko thanked Polanetzki once more and both entered the parlor where tea awaited them.

—"Well, have you finished your business?" asked Panni Mashko.

Polanetzki, again impressed by her appearance and with

her words: "My husband is coming," still ringing in his ears, said, paying no attention to Mashko:

"Between myself and your husband everything is settled, between you and me, nothing as yet."

Panni Mashko, not withstanding her coldness, became visibly confused and almost frightened at his boldness.

"How is that?" queried Mashko.

"Your wife presumed that I am capable of demanding security in the shape of her property, and I cannot forgive her this, under any consideration."

The young woman looked up at him and actually showed surprise. She was evidently interested by his audacity and the wit which he employed to give his words a proper turn.

"I beg your pardon," said she, slowly.

"No, this won't do; you don't know what a revengeful man I am."

"I do not believe you," said she, with a hint at coquetry, like a woman who was sure of herself and knew the influence of her beauty.

Polanetzki sat down at her right, and taking with unsteady hand the cup of tea offered to him, began to sip slowly. Again he recalled the words: "My husband is coming," and his heart was almost bleeding at the thought that these words could only escape the lips of a woman prepared for the worst. At the same time some inner voice whispered to him that it was all "a matter of chance." At this thought his dissipated desires became a dissipated joy—and he lost control over himself. In a moment he began to feel under the table for her foot with his own, but it occurred to him that this was impertinent and rude. At last he calmed himself by the logical assurance that if it was only a question of time one ought to know how to be patient. He did not doubt that "the time and chance" would come sooner or later, and in his own convulsive shuddering and feverish trembling he saw the prospects of future rapture. It was a torture to him in the meantime to support a conversation that did not harmonize with his feelings. He considered Mashko's interrogations about Zavilovski and his plans for the future, his financial status and similar subjects, tedious and annoy-

ing. At last he rose, and before taking leave, turned to Mashko:

"Please lend me your cane. On the way here I was attacked by dogs, and I have no weapon of any kind with me."

It was a falsehood. No dogs attacked him; he simply wished to be left alone for a moment with the lawyer's wife, and when her husband went into the adjoining room, he quickly approached her and said in a dull, cold voice:

—"Do you see what's taking place within me?"

Of course she noticed his agitation, his eyes gleaming with passion and his dilated nostrils, and suddenly she was overcome with alarm and terror. But he remembered her words "My husband is coming," and determined: "Let come what must come!" And this man, who a minute before, just as logically resolved that he ought to know how to wait patiently, now risked everything on one card and whispered hoarsely:

"I love you!"

She stood before him with drooping eyes, as if stupefied, or transformed into a marble column. These words were the key to her perfidy, which in turn opened a new epoch in her life, and she only turned away her head to evade his glance. Deep silence reigned. Only his hard breathing was distinctly heard. Suddenly the squeaking of Mashko's boots was heard, and Polanetzki whispered again:

"Till to-morrow!"

In this "till to-morrow" there was an imperative, commanding tone, but she stood still, cold, unmoved, with her eyes on the floor.

"There is the cane for you!" said Mashko reentering the room. "I am going to the city early to-morrow morning, and will return late at night, won't you be kind enough to call upon my fair 'desert-lady' if the weather is pleasant?"

"Good night," Polanetzki cut him short, and went home.

He was soon on the deserted road, gleaming in the moonlight. It seemed to him that he just escaped a roaring, flaming furnace. The stillness of the night presented such a contrast to his own agitated mind that

he was soon impressed by it, and his first impression was the feeling that his struggle and hesitation were ended. An inner voice upbraided him, that he was a miserably small man, and in this very thought there was the relief of despair. He said to himself, that if he cannot resist temptation, then "the devil take it all." A "small man," at least, need not struggle with his conscience, and he's at peace with himself. It's done! The bridges are burned, he cannot turn back. He will betray Marinya, repulse her heart, her purity, her principles on which he built the structure of his life, but he will be the master of Panni Mashko. There remained the alternative: either she will confess to her husband, and a duel will follow, or she will be silent, and then become his ally and associate in the crime. Mashko leaves town to-morrow, he will have the prey in his clutches,—and then come what may! He was not blind. He did not try to justify himself. He knew that he was not better than other corrupt immoral men. On the contrary, he was inferior to those who sunk in the mire of adultery and depravity knee-deep, did not deceive themselves, did not idealize nor prescribe laws to others. He scarcely believed himself, that he was the same man who in the days gone by worshiped Panni Chavastovska, sincerely pledged Marinya his faithfulness, and deemed himself a man of character and moral sense.

But this unmerciful flaying of himself was a deception, an illusion, resulting from lack of experience; if he loved Emilyya with an ideal love, if he resisted the advances of Panni Osnovski, it was only because these women did not arouse in him those animal passions, which flared up and stormed in his breast at the very sight of this doll with red eyes, whom his soul abhorred, to whom his thoughts flew day and night. He now thought with horror that his feelings for Marinya had never been pure, but were also, after all, mere animal play of passion. Custom and time dulled his nerves, and therefore encouraged or rather repulsed by Marinya's present condition he turned whither he could, without an effort to control himself, without conscience, six months after his wedding.

Coming to his house he noticed that in the room of Marinya a lamp was still burning. He would have given

much to have found her asleep, and he almost decided to walk further on until the light in her room had disappeared. But suddenly he saw her shadow. Evidently she had been waiting for him, and as the moon was high and shining brightly, she must have noticed him.

He went in. She met him clad in a white blouse, her tresses falling over her shoulders. In this there was a certain coquetry. She knew they were beautiful, that he loved to play with them.

"Why are you awake yet?" asked he on entering.

"I waited for you to pray together before retiring," replied she, drawing nearer to him, seemingly sleepy, but smiling. Since their return from Rome they always prayed together at bedtime, but now this thought sickened him.

"Well, my Stach, are you glad that you helped Mashko—are you not, now? Speak up!"

"Yes," drawled out Polanetzki.

"And his wife—does she know of his condition?"

"She does and she does not . . . It's late . . . let us retire."

"Good night. Do you know what I was thinking of in your absence? That you are such a kind, considerate man!"

And she embraced him tenderly. He kissed her with the feeling that he had a right to that kiss, and the assurance of his own depravity, and of a long line of other rascalities which were in store for him in the future.

The following morning he awoke utterly exhausted and almost ill. He felt dissatisfied and chagrined at himself. By the light of a cloudy day, the whole affair assumed a different aspect; his future did not look so dark and threatening, or his crime so black; everything took a diminutive form in his eyes. Now he began to ponder the question, whether Panni Mashko had confessed to her husband or not. At times he admitted that she had, and at the thought he felt like a man who was suddenly precipitated into a deep hole—"a foolish, stupid position to be in," mused he. "One can blame Mashko for everything, but one cannot accuse him of being either a weakling or a coward, and it's doubtful whether he will leave such an

insult go unpunished. This means an explanation, a scandal, and probably a duel. The devil take it all! What a disagreeable affair, especially if it reaches the ears of Marinya!" He immediately felt at war with the whole world. He had always been calm, tranquil, never had a care, had no disagreement with anybody, and today, like an old woman, he sat there guessing: "She said—or she did not," and could think of nothing else since morning.

It finally came to the point that he put the question to himself: "Am I really afraid of Mashko?" He was not afraid of Mashko, but of Marinya. This was also something new and strange to him. Two days previously he would have agreed to almost anything, rather than to the assertion that he would ever be afraid of her. At times, again, he consoled himself with the hope that Panni Mashko would be silent, and then again the hope vanished, and he felt that he did not dare to gaze into Marinya's eyes, that he would be afraid, too, of Bigel, Bigel's wife, Panni Chavastovska, Zaviloski,—in a word, all his friends.

—"This is what one false step costs—and how much blood has been spoiled!"

At last his alarm increased with such rapidity that, under the pretense of sending back the cane to Mashko, he despatched a servant with instructions to give Panni Mashko his regards and inquire about her health. Half an hour later the messenger returned. He had a letter for Marinya from Panni Mashko. While Marinya was perusing its contents, his heart was beating violently.

Marinya read the letter, looked calmly at her husband, and said:

"Panni Mashko invites us to tea this afternoon, also the Bigels."

"Ah-a!" he could only reply, drawing a deep breath, and thought: "She did not say a word."

"Shall we go?"

—"As you please, darling. You may go with the Bigels. I must be in the city after dinner . . . I promised to meet Svirski there. Perhaps I will bring him along with me."

"Then I might as well decline the invitation!"

—“No, go with the Bigels. I will go in and excuse myself . . . or you can do it for me.”

And he went away. He wanted to be left alone with his thoughts.

“She did not say. She did not confess!” was his first thought, and he felt relieved. “She did not say a word, did not take offense, but invited me to come. She consents to everything. I’m willing to go farther. She will let herself be led, where it will please *me* . . . How else should I explain this invitation, if not as a reassuring reply to my ‘till to-morrow!’ It all depends upon me now!”

He was seized by a sensation of triumph and gratified vanity. But, analyzing Panni Mashko, he mentally apologized to her that he dared to doubt her, and believed her an honest woman. Now, at least, he knew what to think of her, and he laughed heartily at his fears, at his alarm.

Thus, for the first time, he confessed his contempt for her whom he struggled to possess; she ceased to be inaccessible, an object for which one is in a constant fight between hope and fear. She now belonged to him, a thing he desired, but did not value. At this moment, when the door was wide open for his assistance, he noticed with amazement that opposition arose within himself, he remembered Marinya, her condition, a future mother of *his* child, he remembered the peaceful happiness he could enjoy at her side. He decided to go to the city and avoid seeing Panni Mashko that day. In the afternoon he ordered the servant to harness his favorite mare to Bigel’s light carriage, and taking leave of Marinya, went away. His sour disposition disappearing, he became of merry mood once more, and regained his old confidence in himself. He was elated to think of Panni Mashko’s surprise at his absence. He felt a necessity for revenge for that merely physical impression she produced upon him. From the moment he read her invitation, his contempt for her increased.

—“What if I would call upon her now and give my words of last night a different meaning! No! one ought not to be a scoundrel toward himself, at least.”

However, he was convinced that if she saw him passing

by without going in, she would think him uncouth,—an unpolished peasant.

But, strangely ! he was suddenly seized by a fear and the same voice that called him last night “ a miserably small man,” now repeated to him with doubled energy the very same words.

“ No, I will not see her,” remonstrated Polanetzki with himself—“ to understand oneself and to control oneself,—are two different things.”

From a distance he could see the villa of Kraslovskia, Panni Mashko's mother. Gazing at its vague outlines, it occurred to him that Panni Mashko, on the spur of the moment, being piqued and irritated, might drop a word or two to his wife, which would open the latter's eyes. She could do it with a word, with a smile, with a glance, giving her to understand that his insolent hopes met defeat at the strong wall of a woman's purity, and thus will his absence be explained. Women seldom deny themselves such pleasing trifles, and still seldom show mercy to their rivals.

“ Ah ! If I only dared call upon her, and——”

At this moment his carriage was on a level with the pavement of Panni Mashko's villa.

“ Halt ! ” he commanded the driver.

He espied on the veranda Panni Mashko, who, however, ran back into the room at the sight of him. Polanetzki passed the courtyard. He was met by a servant.

“ My lady is up-stairs,” said he.

Polanetzki felt that his legs were trembling when he reached the second floor. The thought flashed through his mind :

“ Whoever thinks life a toy, can do with it whatever he pleases. If I, after all I felt, knew and reflected, could not be my own master, I would be the last of men.” And he stopped before the door the servant pointed out to him.

“ May I ? ” asked he.

“ Come in ! ”

And he found himself in the boudoir of Panni Mashko.

“ I came in,” said he giving her his hand, “ to tell you

that I cannot possibly be here this evening. I must be in the city."

Panni Mashko stood with lowered head and eyes. Apparently she was lost, filled with terror. In her figure and in the expression of her face there was something that reminded one of a victim that sees the hand uplifted to strike and knows that its fate is decided.

The same sensation was transmitted to Polanetzki, and quickly, coming closer to her, he grasped her hand and asked in a hoarse voice :

" You are afraid ! What are you afraid of ? " . . .

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE next morning Panni Polanetzki received from her husband a letter in which he informed her that he would not return that day from Warsaw, as he was going to inspect a villa on the other side of the city. He returned the next day with Svirski, who had promised to visit them with the Bigels at their summer villa.

"Just imagine!" said Polanetzki after greeting his wife. "The hamlet Buchinok which I inspected yesterday is a stone's throw from Jasminovka—the estate of old Zavilovski. When I learned of this I called upon the old gentleman, who is under the weather, sick with the gout, and found Svirski there. I took him along to inspect Buchinok. He likes the house. There is a good garden, a large yard and a small stretch of forest. In former years it was a part of a large estate, but the land was sold, and but little is left with the mansion.

"Yes, a very handsome residence," confirmed Svirski. "Plenty of shade, air and repose."

"Will you buy it?" asked Marinya.

"Perhaps. In the meantime I should like to rent it, we could spend there the rest of the summer and convince ourselves of its real worth. The owner is willing to lease it. I wished to close the bargain right then and there, but did not know whether you would like it."

Marinya was sorry to lose the society of the Bigels for the rest of the summer, but seeing that her husband looked at her intently, she took for granted that he had reasons to live apart from them and expressed her consent. The Bigels protested, but had to yield.

"To-morrow," declared Polanetzki, "I will rent the villa, will remove our household effects from Warsaw, and after the morrow shall see us in our new dwelling."

—“ You seem to want to run away from us,” said Panni Bigel.

“ Why are you in such haste ? ” asked her husband.

“ You know that I brook no delays,” laughingly said Polanetzki.

In the meantime dinner was announced, during which Svirski related how he came to be in Jasminovka with old Zavilovski.

“ Helene wanted me to paint her father’s portrait and expressed her wish that I should do the work in Jasminovka. I went there, because I feel lonely when not at work. Besides the old man is such an original character. But my work did not fare very well. The walls of their house are too thick, which makes the rooms dark. I could not draw. Besides, my model became sick with the gout. The physician whom we brought to the village told us that his health is very poor, that in fact, the worst might be expected.”

“ I am very sorry for Zavilovski,” said Marinya.

“ He’s such a nice man. Poor Helene ! In case of his death she’ll be left all alone. Is he conscious of his real condition ? ”

“ Hardly. He’s an original. Ask your husband to tell you how he received him.”

—“ When I came to Jasminovka, Helene brought me to her father. He was saying his prayers, and did not even bow to me. I waited. At last he finished his prayers and turned to me : ‘ Thinking of heaven, I cannot at the same time think of private matters,’ said he ;—‘ I am an old man, and reason in my own fashion.’ ”

“ What a type ! ” exclaimed Svirski.

—“ Then he hinted to me that it was time for him to make his will,” continued Polanetzki, “ but I did not agree with him, as is usually done in such cases. I also thought of Ignati. We spoke of him, by the way. The old man took a great liking to the poet.”

—“ Yes,” exclaimed Svirski—“ as soon as he learned of my visit to Pritulovo he began at once to question about his relative.”

“ Then you were in Pritulovo ? ” inquired Marinya.

—“ Yes, four happy days. I dearly love Osnovski.”

"And Panni Osnovski?"

—"I have in Rome already given you my opinion of the lady, and as far as I remember gave my tongue too much license."

—"Yes, I remember it. You were very discourteous. . . . Well, how does the young couple get along?"

—"Quite happily. A certain Panna Ratkovska is there. A charming little girl:—I almost fell in love with her."

"So! Stanislav told me that you are so easily smitten you are in love right along."

—"Yes, absolutely. I love all women, and independently, too."

"This is the best way never to marry," said Bigel with a serious manner.

"Unfortunately it's so," agreed Svirski, and turning to Marinya, said: "I presume that Stanislav repeated to you our recent conversation. What do you say? If you say—marry, I will marry! This was the agreement between your husband and myself. I wish you could see that Panna Ratkovska. She is called Stephanie—which stands for 'adored.' A beautiful name, is it not? She is so meek and timid, is in mortal fear of Panni Osnovski and Castelli, but withal, apparently, a very generous soul. She is courted by that handsome dandy Kopovski, but she is not a bit enthusiastic about him, as are the other ladies, who paint his portrait, invent for him various costumes, and almost carry him around in their arms. She told me herself that Kopovski bores her, because he's as stupid as a cork."

—"Kopovski, as I heard," interposed Bigel, "is out for money, and Panna Ratkovska is not rich. I know that her father left unpaid debts amounting to——"

"What's that to us?" interrupted Panni Bigel.

—"True, we really don't care a straw for it.—But how does she look, that Panna Ratkovska?"

—"She's not pretty, but very nice, with a pale face and dark eyes. You will see her, for the ladies plan to visit you. I encouraged them in this intention, because I wanted you to see her."

"Very well," replied Marinya with a laugh—"I shall

see her and pronounce my verdict. But what it shall be—I know not.”

—“At any rate I shall propose, and if jilted, I will go away duck-shooting. At the end of June this sport is available.”

“Oh, this is a serious question!” exclaimed Panni Bigel, “a wife or a duck! Zavilovski would not be guilty of saying this.”

“What’s the use of discussing and arguing when you are in love?” wisely remarked Marinya.

—“You are right, and I am consumed by envy—not Castelli—oh, no, though I was once fascinated by her, but I envy that condition, when one does no longer reason.”

—“What have you against Castelli?”

“Absolutely nothing, except sincere gratitude. Thanks to her I experienced in my time a good deal of self-deception. Therefore I will never say anything bad about her. Unless a word escapes my lips now and then against my own will. Therefore don’t pull my tongue, pray.”

“On the contrary you must tell us everything, but not before we go out on the veranda: it’s much nicer there.”

All left the dining-room for the veranda. Bigel’s children scattered over the garden and among the trees like so many butterflies. Bigel treated Svirski to cigars. Marinya approached her husband standing aside, and looking at him with her kindly eyes, asked:

—“Why are you so silent?”

—“I am tired,” replied he. “It’s hot and close in town, but it’s still hotter here. Besides, the whole of last night I could not sleep thinking of Buchinok.”

—“I am very glad that you rented the place, and would like to see it soon.”

But seeing that he was glum, she added:

“We will entertain Svirski here, and you lie down for a short rest.”

“No, it’s useless—I cannot sleep.”

“Now tell us more of Ignati Zavilovski,” Panni Bigel accosted Svirski.

“I like Zavilovski. There is a certain harmony in everything he says and does. I had the opportunity to become intimately acquainted with him during these last

few days in Pritulovo, and we became fast friends. Osnovski also thinks the world of him. I spoke to him and to Osnovski very frankly, and I am afraid that Ignati will not be happy with these ladies."

—"And why not?" asked Marinya.

"It's hard to say why, since there are no facts at hand. But it's felt somehow; they are peculiar natures. . . . You see, all lofty ambitions and views that to Zavilovski are the soul of his life, serve to the fancy of these ladies the office of lace sewed on the seams of the dresses in which they receive visitors; at all other times they parade in wrappers or Mother Hubbards,—and this makes a great difference. I am afraid that they, instead of soaring with him in the blue space, would demand his coming down to their low level, to walk in their steps, that, in short, they would change in small coin the best, the noblest he possesses for the gratification of their common wants and caprices. However, that chap has something in him! I do not expect a catastrophe, but they might be unhappy. In a word I may sum up—you know Zavilovski,—he is a very plain man, and in my opinion in his love for Castelli is his all. He puts into it his whole soul, and she only a part of hers; the rest she retains for various other amusements, in short for that millstone, in which our whole life is ground into dust."

—"Yes, one can expect this from Castelli, and if you are mistaken, the better for Zavilovski, but generally, you said it very cleverly."

"No, first of all it is not honest you seem to be indeed, a woman-hater."

—"I—a woman-hater!" exclaimed Svirski raising his hands to heaven.

—"Don't you see that you make of Castelli a doll-like creature?"

—"I only gave her lessons in painting, but otherwise had nothing to do with her general education."

—"Really, it's so strange that such a kind man should have such an evil tongue!" said Marinya, threatening him with her finger.

—"In this you are partly right. I am conscious of it myself and often question myself whether I am really kind

or not. But I think I am. There are people who condemn their fellow-creatures for the sake of wallowing in the mire—and this is hideous; others are prompted by envy—and this is mean. . . . A Bukatzski did it for the sake of cracking a good joke, but I. . . . I am above all a chatterbox, and then a man, and woman interests me more than anything else;—smallness and shallowness of human nature irritate me. I should like to see all women have wings, but noticing that a good many of them have only tails, I raise my voice at them from sheer astonishment.”

—“But why don’t you use the same tactics toward the men?”

—“What do I care about them? Besides, speaking seriously, we are worth more than our fair sisters.”

This was a signal for a fierce attack by both ladies. The unfortunate artist defended himself bravely and continued: “Take as an illustration Zavilovski and Castelli. Since childhood’s early days he has toiled and labored, came across many unpleasant things, kept his brains in motion, did something for himself, something for the world. And she? A real canary bird in a cage! Give her water, sugar and bird seed—she will eat and drink her fill, ruffle her feathers with her bill, and sing songs. Is this not a plain truth? Yes, we are constantly laboring! Civilization, science, art, bread and everything on which this world is based—is the work of *our* brain. And what a fabulous work it is! It’s easily said, but not so easily done. Of course I will not say that, justly or unjustly, you are barred from it, but generally speaking—your lot in life is only to love, know how to love, then.”

And his dark face assumed an expression of great tenderness, and even melancholy. He continued:

“For instance, I am devoting my time and labor to art. Twenty years I painted and daubed and smeared on paper and on canvas, and God alone knows how much of both I painted until I reached a certain height in my profession, and yet I feel absolutely lonely. And mind you, I don’t want very much, either. Only some honest woman, who would love me a little bit and be grateful for my love.”

—“Then, why don’t you get married?”

—"Because I am afraid," exploded Svirski; "because out of ten women, only one can love."

The conversation here was interrupted by the arrival of Plavitska with Panni Mashko. The latter was dressed in a light blue garment with large buttons, and from a distance looked like a multi-colored butterfly. Coming up to the veranda, Plavitska said:

"Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, good evening, Marinya! I captured Panni Mashko and brought her here. I came here in a hired hansom. Suddenly I espied Panni Mashko standing on her veranda. I dismissed the driver, and we came here on foot."

They all greeted the young woman, who, flushed from her long walk, was taking off her hat and telling them how she was "captured" by Pan Plavitska. She awaited her husband, and did not care to leave the house. Pan Plavitska reassured her that in the country no one would think of gossiping or clinging to etiquette.

He pulled his vest with the grimace of an old man who dreamed that he could still be gossiped about in connection with fair women, then looked roguishly at Panni Mashko and rubbed his hands.

"Yes, the country has its own rules. . . . Yes, its own rules. . . . I like nothing better than the country."

—"If you like the country, why don't you leave town?"

—"Because in the city there is always shade on one side of the street, and the sun on the other. If I am cold I walk on the sunny side, if I am perspiring, on the shady. I wanted to go to Carlsbad, but—" He paused, then added: "But is it worth while worrying over two or three years of life left to me?"

"There you are again, papa!" gaily exclaimed Marinya. "If you don't go to Carlsbad, you will drink Milbrun waters with us at Buchinok."

"At Buchinok?"

"Oh, yes, you don't know yet our grand news?"

And she began to relate to her father that they had rented Buchinok, that they will ultimately buy it, that within two days they will be installed on the premises. Panni Mashko looked with astonishment at Polanetzki.

"Are you really going to desert us?" she asked.

—"Yes," replied Polanetzki.

—"Ah!" was all Panni Mashko uttered, but she gazed at him with the glance of a person who does not comprehend and inquires: "What does it mean?" And, receiving no reply, she turned to Marinya and began to speak to her. She was familiar with the forms and laws of etiquette, and Polanetzki alone knew how the news of Buchinok affected her.

—"How she must despise me," thought he.

But neither of them knew that contempt is only a question of time. Nevertheless, the young woman thought of it as a temporary caprice of a dreamer. She looked upon it as an insult she could not very well explain. One word of his, said in good humor, and at the right time and place, could atone for the wrong. Believing that Polanetzki was eager to explain himself, she decided to accord him that pleasure. When, after tea, she was about to return home, she said, looking at Polanetzki: "Maybe, some of you gentlemen will have the goodness to see me home?"

Polanetzki rose. His worn-out, angry countenance looked as if he would say: "If you want to hear the truth from me, you shall hear it." But Bigel unexpectedly came between them by saying: "The evening is so nice, we will all accompany you to your villa." Plavitska, believing himself Panni Mashko's knight for the evening, gave her his arm, and the entire way to the villa engaged her in conversation, so she could not say a word to Polanetzki, except "good night" at the gates of her house. This was accompanied by a shaking of hands, into which she put a hidden significance. It, however, remained unanswered.

Polanetzki was glad that he was not required to make any explanations. He concluded that to remain in Bigel's villa was a dangerous play with fire, and he leased Buchinok only because all strong natures, when pressed to the wall, instinctively take measures for their defense, though their actions had no close connection with what actually pains them. He did not think that his flight meant the return to the straight path, or at least leads to it. It

seemed to him that it was too late, that now everything was lost. Having proven false to Marinya, he now betrayed Panni Mashko. This was a new rascality which he owned up to in despair, being convinced that with all his efforts he will surely sink into the dark and dreary abyss. After bidding good-by to Panni Mashko, the entire company returned home. Marinya walked beside her husband, who was pensive, and Marinya, believing that he was pondering over the purchase of Buchinok, did not molest him. They all remained on the veranda. Bigel made efforts to detain Svirski for the night, making fun of his herculean form squeezed into Plavitzka's small sulky, together with its owner.

"Remain here," urged he; "to-morrow morning I am going to the city myself and will take you along in my cart."

"I wish to begin work to-morrow morning early. If I remain another delay will ensue."

"Why, is it such a timely order?"

"No, but my hand becomes heavy. Painting is like music, it demands constant exercise. I lost a good deal of time in going to Pritulovo, and visiting you,—meanwhile, the colors are becoming dry."

Panni Polanetzki laughed, and looking in the direction of Svirski's hand said: "You are complaining in vain. It is not only artists who must always go forward and never halt. Whether one works over a painting or over himself, he must go ahead, every hour, every minute, or he runs the risk of being left behind."

—"Yes, we must all work very hard!" sighed Plavitska.

Marinya paid no attention, but raising her eyes as if looking for comparisons, continued:

"You see, whoever said to himself that he is sufficiently good and clever, this very saying of his is neither good nor clever. It seems to me, as if we are swimming on a stormy sea, trying to reach the shore, and whoever folds his hands for a minute, goes to the bottom owing to his own weight."

"Bosh! Phrases!" interposed Polanetzki.

"No, Stach. These are not phrases!" protested his wife.

"God grant that all may speak thus," said Svirski after a pause. "You are absolutely right."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"OH, my dearest, why don't you dress, like Kopovski," said Panni Bronich to Zavilovski. "Of course, Linetti values more your poetry than any costly garment, but you will not believe what an esthetic soul she is! Yesterday she came up to me and asked with such a pretty manner: 'Auntie, why has not Ignati a white flannel suit for morning wear?' Osnovski has one, and you'd better get one yourself. I know it's a trifle, but women desire that men should satisfy their caprices in small things. She is very observant. In Sheveningen all men parade in those white suits till noon, and it would shock her to have people think you don't belong to good society. You are so kind, and will do it for my sake. I hope you are not angry, for my interfering in the matter."

"On the contrary—with great pleasure."

"Oh, what a good kind man you are. . . Yes. What did I wish to say! . . . Buy yourself a dress-suit case. Linetti is very fond of those traveling bags the men carry on their journeys. Pardon my intrusion, but it's a trifle, you see. I know women well, especially my Linetti. She wants to be pleased even in trifles. As to great things, she can always resign herself to her fate. You heard what grand matches she could have made, but she chose you. You, as a psychologist, ought to have observed that such natures are capable of bringing great sacrifices, but they control themselves for extraordinary exceptional occasions, but in everyday life they want to be pleased and petted."

Zavilovski took his notebook from his pocket and said: "I must put down all your suggestions or else I might forget them."

In this reply there was a shade of irony, but Panni Bronich often abused his patience, especially with her fond-

ness for the outer polish. It divulged the "parvenu" nature. But loving Linetti, and feeling himself, thanks to this love, a better man, he thought kindly of the old woman, and reasoned that a human being, sincerely attached to another, cannot be very bad, and in the name of that common love he forgave her her defects.

However, in Linetti he could find nothing detrimental to her charms that captured his love. The loftier souls of men make blunders only because they crown the women of their choice with their halo, not comprehending that the glimmer of light that shone upon them, belonged to themselves. Thus it was ever with Zavilovski. Linetti became accustomed more and more to her rôle of betrothed, and the thought that he selected her, preferred her to others, that he was infatuated with her, lost its original charm and value. All she could possibly gain from it for her own glorification, she obtained with the aid of her "sweet auntie." Once they came in their promenades upon a damp meadow, and Zavilovski returned hastily to the house and brought her rubbers. Kneeling down at the root of a tree, he put the rubbers on her little feet, and kissed the latter. Gazing at his head bent to her feet, she said: "The world considers you a great man—and you are putting on my rubbers."

"Because I love you so!" said Zavilovski merrily, still on his knees.

"This is well, but what would people say?"

The last question seemingly interested her most of all. Zavilovski was blind, and Linetti stuck to him like a cobweb to the wings of a bird, that unwillingly raised it to that height where one listens to every throbbing of the heart, divines everything, feels and understands everything. And Linetti was such a "dear lazy girl!" She said that herself to her "falcon," who did not guess that all those heights to which he wished to fly with her made her dizzy and weary. She learned all her lessons, related all she was taught and believed the last days of her maiden frolics would be her vacation. She had an ample supply of eccentricities, original characteristics and clever sayings, of her own make and borrowed, with which she fought and won her battles. Now she noticed that their stock became

exhausted, and at the bottom of the well there was nothing—but the bottom itself. All that remained was the artistic feeling, and if Ignati could content himself with that. She often pointed out to him a pretty nook in the forest, a dale fragrant with flowers, a sunset, and said to him exultingly: "How beautiful!" With Kopovski she felt much more at ease. With him she made no effort to look wiser than she was, and his company was to her a much desired rest. His very face called back the smile to her lips and her disposition for joking. But Zavilovski, who gloried in living a "mental" life, and therefore measuring everything with his own yardstick, could not conceive how such a "clever," such a spirited, "inspired" girl could waste one moment on Kopovski with any other object than to make him the target for her jokes and sarcastic remarks. He could not compare his Linetti to Panni Osnovski. The two women in his eyes were two opposite poles—North and South. Linetti chose him—and he was the antithesis to Kopovski. This alone shattered all his doubts. Linetti let herself be entertained by Kopovski, found great amusement in flirting with him, just because she was a child and in need of a toy. But Panni Osnovski, among others, said to her husband that Castelli was seriously flirting with Kopovski. Osnovski at times "woke" up to the conclusion that Kopovski would be better out of Pritulovo, but his wife would not submit to it. "As long as he courts Stephanie," declared she, "we have no right to interfere."

Osnovski was at first surprised and then shocked at Linetti's behavior with Kopovski, and not being as stupid as his Anette wished him to be, made many a discovery that caused him alarm for the happiness of Zavilovski.

He thought with horror what the future of Ignati was likely to be with a woman who did not appreciate him, and is so little developed as to find delight in the company of such a brainless Adonis. "No, she is a mere Marionette, and if the influence of such persons as Anette and Ignati was in vain, nothing will arouse her."

Thus Zavilovski, this unfortunate man suffering with the blindness of love, while discovering the true situation on one side, committed a grave error on the other.

Kopovski's phenomenal stupidity was growing as it seemed in the fresh air. But his face, as if to recompense him for the above deficiency, was becoming still more handsome. The sun tanned his face, which made his eyes appear more expressive, his teeth whiter, and the growth above the lip brilliant like silk. Indeed, the splendor reflected itself in his attire, from the whiteness of his neckties, to his exquisite, though simple, costumes. Dressed in the morning in a suit of English flannel, for tennis, he was an inspiration of the freshness of the dawn. His lithe, pliant figure was charmingly set off by the soft material; how indeed could that angular, bony Zavilovski, with his bold Wagnerian jaw and long legs, compare himself with him before the ladies. One must be as queer as Stephanie Ratkovska to insist that Kopovski is nothing more than an unbearable doll. It is true, Castelli smiled approvingly when Svirski told her once that Kopovski, when suddenly confronted with a question, had the air of one who swallowed a yard-stick.

Still he was gay, amiable, and notwithstanding his stupidity, well trained, and so charming, so fresh, that a good deal could be forgiven him.

Zavilovski was mistaken in his belief that Panni Bronich was partial to external gloss, and that his bride was ignorant of her demands. Linetti knew all. Having lost hope that Ignati would ever compare with Kopovski in appearance, she now strove that he should be at least more or less similar to him. She had an innate attraction for the exquisite things of a man's toilet, and whenever her aunt made those frivolous requests of Zavilovski, it was done according to her wish.

But for Panni Osnovski and other outside influence, Linetti would probably have married Kopovski. In fact Osnovski wondered that it did not happen so. After all his observations he came to the conclusion that it would have been better for Linetti as well as for Zavilovski.

Once he uttered this thought to his wife, but the latter grew angry and replied:

"It did not happen, and could not have happened! I was the first to notice her flirtation with Kopovski. Who could know that she has such a character—a bride of one

and flirting with another! Perhaps she does it out of spite for Ratkovska, or in order to arouse Zavilovski's jealousy. Who can tell? It is for you to put all the blame on me, that I arranged the match. Just recall how many times you yourself were enthusiastic about Linetti, how many times you said that hers was an extraordinary nature, that she would make Zavilovski happy. A really good nature! Now she flirts with Kopovski, but if she were engaged to the latter, she would have probably flirted with Zavilovski. An empty-headed person will always remain such. You say that she would be more suitable for Kopovski, but you ought to have thought of it before. You say purposely in order to prove how stupid it was of me to aid Ignati."

"Ah, Anette!" Osnovski began to justify himself, "how can you admit that I wanted to cause you any unpleasantness. I am simply anxious about Ignati's future, for I love him dearly. I would be delighted if God sent him just such a creature as you yourself are. You know, my darling, that I would rather bite my tongue than tell you anything disagreeable. I simply wanted to speak to you and consult you, as I know very well that there will always appear an idea in your little head."

And he kissed lovingly and passionately her hands, her shoulders, her face, but she turned away from him and said :

"Ah, how you perspire!"

There was always, really, a layer of perspiration on him, for all day he was either playing tennis, riding, rowing, or engaged in some sort of violent exercise, in order to reduce his weight.

"Well, say only that you are not angry with me," he answered, releasing her hand and looking into her eyes.

"Well, certainly not. But what can I advise? Let them go as soon as possible to Scheveningen and Kopovski can remain here with Stephanie."

"Now, you have found a remedy. They must go in the beginning of August! . . . But did you observe that Stephanie is not quite disposed toward him?"

"Stephanie is dissembling! . . . You don't know women yet."

"You are right. I even noticed that she is a little inimical to Linetti, and perhaps at the bottom of her heart she is angry with Kopovski."

"What?" inquired Osnovski with animation. "May be you have observed something in his relations to her?"

"No; he simply jests with her and smiles, for he has beautiful teeth. Bah! if I observed anything, he would not now be here in Pritulovo. It's possible that Castelli shows off her charms before him, because she simply cannot help doing so. *Sans le savoir* . . ."

"Nevertheless, we'll have to speak to Kopovski in reference to Stephanie, and you know what? I will take a ride on horseback with him in the direction of Lyesnichovka, and will talk to him seriously; you ride in the opposite direction."

"Very well, my dear. Evidently, your little head begins to work."

He wanted to leave, but, stopping at the threshold, he meditated, and then added:

"But how strange and incomprehensible it is: this Ignati is so penetrating, so wise, and still he does not see anything to disquiet him about Castelli."

At midday, when Kopovski and Panni Osnovski were riding on the shady roadway in the direction of Lyesnichovka, Zavilovski, looking after her and gazing at her beautiful figure, clad in her riding-habit, thought to himself:

"How graceful and attractive she is. Really, it is irony of fate, that the honest and hearty Osnovski should be so blind."

Yes, it was irony of fate, but it did not consist of that.

CHAPTER XXXV.

WITH the ride of Panni Osnovski and Kopovski to Lyesnichovka, a change took place in the hitherto amiable relations of the inhabitants of Pritulovo. It is true, Zavilovski still gazed into the eyes of his bride with delight, but in the latter's disposition toward him a shade of spiteful irony could be noticed. Kopovski felt constrained, glanced at Linetti by stealth, and this only in Osnovski's absence, but generally conversed with Ratkovska absent-mindedly. As to Panni Osnovski, she was more animated than ever, and extended her managing function over the affairs of Pritulovo so far as to drive with Kopovski a couple of times more for serious explanations.

Still, these changes could only be observed by an experienced eye familiar with that sort of life, in which, with the absence of better aims and everyday toil, the slightest tints of emotion and the finest fragments of thought not only assume the form of incidents, but very frequently contain the germ of the latter. Externally life remained as of old, that is—a daily festival consisting of picnics, love, esthetical impressions, more or less interesting conversations, languor and diversions. The making up of the program for each successive day was the sole care of Osnovski, as the master of the house.

One morning, the usual monotony was broken by the arrival of two letters with black edges addressed to Osnovski and Zavilovski. They were all at the table drinking their coffee after dinner. The eyes of the women were curiously and anxiously turned to the two men, who having opened the letters almost simultaneously exclaimed :

“ Old Zavilovski is dead ! ”

This intelligence produced a startling effect.

Madame Bronich, as a woman of the old school, deemed

it good taste to be deprived for a time of the power of speech. Ratkovska, who lived for a time with the Zavilovskis, grew pale. Linetti, grasping her aunt's hands, tried to draw her to her and whispered: "Chère tu n'es pas raisonnable!"

The silence was broken by Ignati Zavilovski:

"I knew him very little and was even prejudiced against him; but now I am heartily sorry, for the old man, as I convinced myself, was in reality an excellent man."

"He also grew to love you," returned Osnovski. "I have proof of it."

"The old man," Panni Bronich, who had collected herself was heard to remark, "was very fond of Linetti, and surely a loving man cannot be bad." At times he reminded her of Theodor, and she was, therefore, attached to him. True, he was frequently as rough as Theodor was amiable, but both were magnanimous and God will bless them.

Zavilovski, feeling that he and Linetti were stricken with their first common sorrow, began to kiss her hands. But this was soon interrupted by Kopovski who, as if meditating on the mortality of man, suddenly declared:

"It is curious to know, what will Helena do with her father's pipes."

The old nobleman had the best collection of pipes in town; disgusted with cigarettes and cigars, he frequently entertained in his house lovers of the patriarchal pipe. Nevertheless, Kopovski's anxiety about the pipes remained unheeded, for another letter was brought to Zavilovski from Polanetzki, who conveyed to him the same intelligence with an invitation to the funeral.

It was decided by those present to go at once to the town for their mourning apparel.

Zavilovski, after having made the necessary purchases, returned to Osnovski's country house intending to pass the evening with his bride. At the entrance he heard sounds of music coming from the inner rooms. He met Ratkovska in the corridor and inquired who was playing.

"Linetti with Kopovski," she answered.

"So Kopovski is here yet?"

"He came a quarter of an hour ago."

"And the Osnovskis?"

"They have not returned yet. Anette is shopping."

For the first time he felt displeased with Linetti. Though the old nobleman was nothing to her, still it seemed rather bad taste to play duets with Kopovski. Especially that gay waltz, at such an inopportune time. Panni Bronich who was also present in the room evidently perceived Zavilovski's displeasure for she hastened to remark:

"Linetti was very much agitated and fatigued; and you know that only music quiets her nerves."

They stopped playing, and the disagreeable impression in Zavilovski was soon dissipated. At dusk he was affectionately walking with her arm-in-arm through the rooms.

"Do you remember," he said, stopping in her studio, "how, once, while painting, you placed your hands on my temples to adjust the head a little, and I kissed your hand for the first time? . . . I lost my presence of mind then, but I remember your words: 'Speak to aunt!'"

"And how pale you were then!" she replied.

"It is not surprising at all. I loved you with all my heart."

"But how queer all this is!" Linetti said, glancing at him.

"What is queer?"

"That all this commences generally with a sort of disturbance, mysteriousness, a kind of poetry . . . then you become used to it, and the lock is closed. . . ."

"Yes, you are locked in, my darling!" he said, pressing her shoulder to his chest, "and now I'll not let you go any more."

A short pause followed, which was suddenly interrupted by Zavilovski:

"Do you love me?"

"You know it yourself."

"Tell me: Yes?"

"Yes."

He pressed her again to his heart and spoke in an altered tone:

"You yourself have no idea what an amount of real happiness is contained in you, and how I love you. You

are for me life, the world, everything. I am ready to die at your feet."

"Let us sit down," she whispered, "I am tired."

And they sat down in a dark corner of the room, close to each other.

"What is the matter with you?" suddenly inquired Linetti. "You are all in a tremble."

But she herself, excited by recollections, or perhaps seized with the same feeling as himself, began to breathe harder and with half-opened eyes, drew to him for a kiss.

On going home, Zavilovski reflected, that indeed Linetti had become coiled around his heart so closely that it would be impossible to live a day without her.

The funeral of old Zavilovski took place in the presence of only a few of his former acquaintances. Most of his neighbors were abroad. But in the church a big crowd of peasants congregated and stood beside the rich coffin. Apparently, it seemed to them strange that such a rich man should die and be buried like any peasant. As to the friends, the greater part were mainly preoccupied with the thought as to what disposition the heiress,—Helena, would make of her bequeathed millions. They were wondering at the stoicism with which she bore the loss of a father, the more so because she was left alone without relatives or even friends. The ladies of Pritulovo did not understand that Helena was supported in her affliction by that sublime faith which teaches that death, however sad an occurrence, is simply a transitory stage in existence. Speaking of his last days, Helena turned to Zavilovski and said:

"He remembered you also. About an hour before his death he requested to be informed at once as soon as you arrived in Buchinok, as he wished to see you. He was very fond of you and your work."

"I myself am sincerely sorry for the bereavement," replied Zavilovski, kissing her hand. There was so much feeling and candor in his words and tone, that Helena's eyes filled with tears. Even Panni Bronich began to cry, and but for the bottle of smelling salts would have swooned away.

But the young girl, giving no heed at all to Panni Bronich's wailing, turned to Polanetzki and thanked him for the assistance he rendered her during the funeral.

Polanetzki's wife was not present at the burial, but after the interment she endeavored by all means in her power to console the daughter of the deceased. She invited her, together with the ladies of Pritulovo, to a stay at Buchinok. Polanetzki seconded her invitation, but Helena refused, saying that she would not feel lonesome in Jasminovka.

The ladies of Pritulovo accepted the invitation to visit Marinya, who was very curious about Ratkovski, and placed the latter in the same carriage with herself. The two young women at once felt an attraction toward each other. In Ratkovski's sad eyes and face there was something that betokened her timid nature and reserve, which Marinya perceived at once; on the other hand, Ratkovski, who had heard very much of Marinya, clung to her at once with all her heart. They came to Buchinok the best of friends.

Marinya showed her residence to the guests. They were mainly interested in the garden in which grew grand old poplars. Svirski, who came to learn Marinya's opinion of her new friend, took this opportunity, when all the visitors were scattered on the paths, to hurriedly inquire of her :

"Well, what impression did Stephanie produce on you?"

"The most favorable. She is probably a most sympathetic and kind child. Improve your acquaintance and study her."

"Study, what for? I'll this very day, and even right here in Buchinok confess to her. I have no need for examining and reflecting. In such affairs there must be a certain degree of hazard. Positively, to-day?"

Panni Polanetzki laughed; she thought he was jesting, but he replied earnestly:

"I am myself rejoiced, because there is nothing mournful in this. All my life I have feared women, but I am not afraid of Stephanie; it must be because she has a kind heart."

"I think so myself."

"Well, then, now is the time. If she accepts my proposition, I'll carry her right here (he pointed to his breast pocket), if not, I'll——"

"Well?"

"I'll shut myself in for a whole day and paint from morning till night. I hope she will accept . . . I know she does not like that wax doll of a Kopovski. She is an orphan and will commit the most benevolent deed by taking me. I'll be grateful for this boon all my life. I am really a good fellow ; I am only afraid of growing stale."

Marinya observed that Svirski was possibly capable of serious conversation, and she replied :

"You are, indeed, a kind man, and you will not, therefore, become stale."

"On the contrary," he returned with great animation, "this is my only misgiving. Let me be frank with you. I am not at all as happy as it might appear. It is true, I attained fame, money, but there is no other individual in this world who yearns for a true woman as much as I do. There is so much levity, egotism and triviality among our ladies, that at the mere sight of them I feel that staleness coming on me. But this child is altogether different,—so quiet, modest, amiable. Ah, if she only consented!"

While Svirski was thus engaged with Marinya, Panni Bronich took Polanetzki aside and began conversing with him.

"Yes, he reminded me of my young days ; though our friendly relations were interrupted for a long time, I still entertained the warmest regard for him. I suppose you heard. But no, you could not have heard, for I divulged it to nobody ; nevertheless, it depended on me to become Helena's mother. Now there is no need of keeping it a secret. He proposed to me twice, and I refused, though I loved and respected him. You understand that when one is young she seems something like what I had found in my Theodor. . . . Ah, yes ! Refused twice. Ah, how he suffered then, but what could I do. You yourself, in my position, would not have acted otherwise. Is it not true?"

Polanetzki, not in the least desirous of answering her question, simply said :

"Did you not wish to inquire about something?"

"Yes, yes! I wanted to know how he passed his last moments. Helena told me that he died suddenly; but you, a neighbor and friend, probably had an inkling of his latest intentions or thoughts? Of course, personally I am little interested, but you don't know Linetti! . . . Zavilovski gave her his word of honor that he would bequeath to Ignati his Prussian estates. If he did not fulfil this promise or could not do so, may God forgive him as well as I do. Certainly, the main point is not the fortune; Lord knows we little need it. If it were otherwise, Linetti would not have rejected such offers, as for instance from Marquis Kolimacho or Pan Konafaropulo; and perhaps you heard of Cherimski? It's the same that, thanks to his pictures, acquired a palace in Venice. This year he proposed to Linetti. Perhaps somebody does really need a fortune, but it is not us, thank God. All I want is that she should never, by word or thought, consider herself as having committed a sacrifice, for from the worldly point of view she really sacrifices herself for his sake."

The last words angered Polanetzki.

"I don't know either the Marquis Kolimacho, or Konafaropulo, and even the very names sound somewhat strangely in Warsaw. . . . I suppose Linetti marries out of love; there should, therefore, be no question of self-immolation. Pardon my candor. Whether Zavilovski is a practical man or not,—it is immaterial; but he does not know nor wishes to know, if Castelli has any dower; while you are not ignorant of his possessions even from a worldly point of view."

"It appears that you don't know of Castelli's origin: she descends from Marino Falieri."

"It is unknown to me, as well as to anybody else, I suppose. Since you mentioned the word 'sacrifice,' let me tell you frankly that in no particular is Zavilovski inferior to Linetti, even if you lose sight of his talents and social position."

It appeared from Polanetzki's tone of voice and expression of face that he was apt to go further in his candor should Panni Bronich prove not contented with what she had already heard. But apparently there were still left

some shafts in her quiver, for, grasping his hand and pressing it violently, she exclaimed:

"Ah, how good you are with your kind defense of Ignati! But really there was no necessity of protecting him against me. Why, I love him like my own son. If I inquired about the last arrangements old Zavilovski made, it was simply in behalf of Ignati, out of my great love for him. Certainly, Helena has no need of those millions . . . while Ignati could do so much with them."

"What can I answer you?" returned Polanetzki. "There is no doubt that Zavilovski thought of Ignati, but this is all I am certain about. If there is a will, it will be made public in a few days, for Helena certainly will not conceal it. . . ."

"You know that dear, kind Helena? Of course, not as much as I do. Have the goodness, therefore, not to suspect her in my presence. Helena will never conceal it."

"Have the kindness not to ascribe to me opinions which I never entertained. Besides, a will cannot be concealed, because it is drawn in the presence of witnesses."

"Now, you see, it cannot even be concealed; I was myself convinced. Besides, old Zavilovski was so fond of Linetti, that, at least for her sake, he would not have forgotten Ignati. Why, he carried her in his arms when she was such," and she made a movement with her hand showing to Polanetzki how big Linetti was at that time.

They soon rejoined the company. The table was laid for breakfast, and the guests took their seats. Looking up at Castelli, Polanetzki observed:

"So you are an old acquaintance of the late Zavilovski?"

"Oh, yes," replied Linetti, "three—four years. Aunt, how long ago were we introduced to Zavilovski?"

"And what does this little head only think of?" exclaimed Panni Bronich, turning to Svirski. "Ah, what a happy age, what a happy epoch!"

Meanwhile Svirski, sitting near Ratkovska, felt that the explanation was not at all so easy an affair as he told Marinya. There was the presence of strangers, and besides he experienced a certain anxiety, losing his pres-

ence of mind even in the contemplation of the coming avowal. "It's queer," he thought. "I am a greater coward than I expected." Now he noticed that Ratkovska possessed a beautiful neck, there was the tint of pearl around the ears, and she had a very musical voice. After breakfast the company kept together, as if purposely to interfere with his intentions. The ladies were fatigued with the funeral, and began soon to take leave. It was disagreeable, but still it relieved him a little. "It is not my fault," he thought, "that she goes away. I positively wanted to confess." Nevertheless, at the last moment, he summoned all the firmness of his will. While accompanying Ratkovska to the carriage he said:

"Osnovski asked me to visit Pritulovo. I will come without fail with my brush and palette. It would be delightful to have your head!"

And he broke the sentence, not knowing how to come to the point that interested him most. But the young girl, evidently not accustomed to being the object of interest, asked with surprise:

"Mine?"

"Allow me to be my own echo this time and repeat what I said," he hurriedly whispered in a subdued voice.

Ratkovska looked at him as if not comprehending the meaning of his words. But just then Osnovski called her to the carriage, and he hardly had time to take her hand and say:

"Good-by!"

The young girl raised her umbrella, and the painter cast his last glance in the direction of the carriage.

"Did I explain or not?" he asked himself.

He was inclined to answer in the affirmative, and his firm hint about "having that head" pleased him immensely. Still there was no particular joy or anxiety usually felt in such cases. On the contrary, he felt a want of a mysterious something.

Panni Polanetzki, who watched their leave-taking from afar, was burning with curiosity. It was betokened in her eyes, though she did not dare to inquire verbally. He smiled, and replied directly:

"Yes . . . almost . . . but not all. There was neither time nor occasion to speak more freely, and there was, therefore, no answer; I don't know if she understood me. In any case, I shall be in Pritulovo to-morrow, or will write to her. I hope the answer will be favorable."

He kissed her hand, and in a moment was driving homeward.

"Ah, Svirski, Svirski!" he muttered to himself. "What became of you? Was it not you that for twenty-five years prepared the leap over that chasm? Did not what you have chanted about happen only this morning? Where is your longing then, your joy? And why don't you call aloud: 'At last!' Don't you see, old dotard, you are going to be married!"

But all efforts to excite himself were in vain. Inwardly he remained undisturbed, cool. Surprise and wonder took possession of him. He certainly acted consciously, and was not a giddy child that did not know its own whims. Having once concluded that matrimony would be the best state for him, he did not change his opinion. Ratkovska was the same sweet, quiet creature, the longed-for "girl"; why, then, did not the recollection of her agitate him at least.

"What I told her was all right, but rather dry. Yes, really dry and incomprehensible. . . . Besides, I hardly myself believe that it happened."

And the impressions of the artist interrupted his train of thoughts. On the meadow glistening in the sunbeams a herd of sheep were grazing. On the green background they appeared to him like white spots.

"They feel well—these sheep. They are grazing calmly on the meadow. But the devil take it, I will also marry."

And he resumed his reverie. There are different thoughts crossing man's mind that he fain would not admit; there are also feelings which one is loath to turn into clear consciousness. He did not love Ratkovska, but would not confess that he was going to take the girl simply because he had to marry. Others loved, thanks to a woman, while he took the other road and reached simply the requirement of woman. Many, possessing an idol, built a temple for

him, while he did just the opposite. Now he understood why he was so energetic and resolute in the morning and so cool a little later. This was the more distressing since he knew his capacity for love. He recalled what Polanetzki told him of a certain physician, who was rejected by a senseless doll and who observed :

“I know what she is, but cannot tear my heart away from her.” That was true love.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A FEW days later the will was to be made public. At Helena's request Zavilovski went to Jasminovka together with Polanetzki, a notary public and the lawyer Kononovich. The first two days he wrote to Linetti letters full of endearments, love, but not a word about the legacy. This evidently did not please the aunt; she secretly told Anette, that first of all, it is absurd to write letters to a bride, and second,—that it is “*quelque chose de louche*,” premeditated silence on an interesting point. She could not remain quiet in Pritulovo, and in two days went to town, under some pretext, in order to learn something definite about the legacy.

She returned the next day bringing with her Panni Mashko, whom she met at the station, and the information that old Zavilovski left everything to his daughter Helena. But this was already known in Pritulovo from Ignati's third letter, which was received in her absence. Nevertheless, the old woman's story produced a disagreeable impression. Here a few strange things have to be noted. These ladies made their acquaintance with Ignati when he was poor. Linetti became his bride when there was no expectation of any inheritance whatever! All this happened, thanks to Panni Osnovoski, under the influence of the general enthusiasm aroused by Zavilovski's poems and fame. It was also due to a great extent to public opinion that eulogized Linetti for marrying a man who possessed no earthly riches but poetical genius. It was much later that hopes had arisen, which made Zavilovski an enviable match even from a material standpoint. But such is human nature, that as soon as those hopes were dissipated, the man appeared lower in their estimation.

In his last letter Zavilovski wrote to Linetti that “I

would wish to be a Croesus for your sake, but what are riches in comparison with you. I do not even think of it, you should not, therefore, be distressed. You are my only happiness, everything else is naught," etc. As to Linetti, Zavilovski was not mistaken. She studiously avoided the subject of the legacy, at least in the presence of people, whatever the motive might have been.-

Osnovski, though sorely disappointed, tried nevertheless to belittle the catastrophe.

"I don't think he would have ceased to write if he had received the inheritance, still the mere administration of such an immense estate would have deprived him of a good deal of his valuable time, with the consequent detriment to his talent. I involuntarily recall the words of Henry VIII., who said to one of his princes about Golbein: 'I can turn ten peasants into ten princes, but would not be able to produce a single Golbein from ten princes.' Ignati is a rare man. Believe me, aunt, I loved and respected Linetti, but these feelings became ten times greater since her acquaintance with him. To be something in the life of such a man is a high destiny that will arouse envy in every woman. Is it not so, Anette?"

"You are right," replied Panni Osnovski, "every woman likes to belong to a man that represents something."

Osnovski grasped her hand and covered it with kisses.

"Do you think it does not vex and disturb me," he observed half-seriously and half-jestingly, "that such a being as you should belong to a zero in the person of Joseph Osnovski. But what can be done! It took place. Now I can only say that this zero loves his unit to madness."

He turned then in the direction of Panni Bronich:

"Just take into consideration, aunt, that Ignati has his own capital of ten thousand roubles; besides, his father will leave quite a significant sum which the late Zavilovski placed in a bank in his name for his maintenance in the hospital. In any case he will live comfortably."

Panni Bronich shook her head disdainfully.

"Naturally," she replied, "Linetti consenting to marry Zavilovski never thought of his financial condition. If

such a consideration should enter her head, all she needed is just to hint, and Konafaropulo would be her husband.

"Spare me!" exclaimed Panni Osnovski laughing.

"Nothing awful has occurred," rejoined Osnovski. "Helena will, probably, never marry, and her fortune will be left to Ignati or to his children."

But noticing her saddened face he grew silent and then added:

"Really, aunt, the best policy is to trust in God; be kind and merry! . . . Ignati is not lowered one iota in our eyes."

Well, of course," she replied with some anger, "Zavilovski is just the same. Certainly, he possesses talent, but still everybody will say that he makes an excellent match by marrying Linetti. There can be no two opinions on this subject. . . . Nobody thinks of his fortune; but people speak variously about the means through which old Zavilovski raised him in public opinion. May God forgive the old man's sins and deceit. Nevertheless, it were better if Ignati had made no hints as to the probability of his becoming the heir of old Zavilovski."

"Pardon me, aunt!" exclaimed Osnovski, "this is entirely too much! He never made any such hints, and would not even have gone to the old man if not for you."

But Panni Bronich let loose the wings of her fancy, and she continued with irritation:

"Perhaps he did not hint it to you, Osnovski, but he did so to me. But I have told you already that the main point is not riches. You, Anette, never were a mother, and can't therefore perceive what anxiety we experience while giving away our daughters. . . . First of all I discovered that, with all his good qualities, Zavilovski has a dreadful character. I suspected this before. If his character be bad, why, it will ruin Linetti. Polanetzki himself does not deny that it is so. Ignati's father has also an impossible character, which brought him even to insanity; this might be hereditary. I know that Ignati loves Linetti apparently (if men are only capable of love), but how long may it continue? Why, you yourself will not deny that he is a great egotist (but all men are selfish). It should, therefore, be no surprise to anybody that I feel

anxious about Linetti, that I fear lest she should fall into the hands of a barbarian or insane egotist."

"No, this is impossible!" exclaimed Osnovski, turning to his wife. "It is enough to drive one crazy."

Panni Osnovski was amused with their continuous wrangling. This time, however, it assumed a too serious character, for the old woman, looking with compassion at Osnovski, continued:

"Besides, that sphere. . . . All those Polanetzkis, Svirskis, Bigels. . . . It is all inadequate for Linetti. Between ourselves, who are these people, Zavilovski's friends, with whom Linetti will have to come in contact! . . ."

"Ah, that's how we speak!" interrupted Osnovski. "If it comes to this, allow me to remind you, dear aunt, who old Zavilovski was. As to the sphere, I have the honor to declare that we are mere upstarts in comparison with the Polanetzkis; it is they who condescend, not we. I am not fond of genealogies, but if it be your wish, I'll get for you conclusive data for my assertion. You probably heard of the Svirskis, who descend from an old princely stock, one branch of which, on migrating into greater Poland, voluntarily gave up its princely title, although it belongs to them by right and justice. That's who they are. As to ourselves, my grandfather was a notary in Ukrayna, and I am not at all ashamed of it. Whence the Bronichs come, you yourself, aunt, know better than I. The same is true of Castelli."

"Castelli descends from Marino Falieri!" exclaimed the old woman with dignity.

"Allow me, aunt, to remind you that we are alone here, and can permit ourselves, therefore, to speak the truth."

"But did not it depend on Linetti herself to become the Marchioness of Kalimacho?"

"Do you know, aunt, the comic opera, *La vie parisienne*? There figures in it an admiral from Switzerland. But why should we quarrel? You know I always loved Linetti, and only wished that she should prove worthy of Ignati."

But this was adding fuel to the fire. It appeared to Panni Bronich a real blasphemy, and she completely lost her temper.

"That Linetti should prove worthy of Ignati!" she exclaimed.

Fortunately, the conversation was interrupted by the arrival of Panni Mashko. Osnovski inquired where the rest of the company remained.

"Kopovski, Linetti, and Stephanie are in the greenhouse; they are doing some painting, while Kopovski diverts them."

"With what?" inquired Osnovski.

"With his chat; we all laughed listening to his stories."

"Is Stephanie also in the greenhouse?" asked Panni Osnovski.

"Yes, they are painting together."

"Do you wish to join them?" inquired the husband.

"All right."

Just then the servant brought some letters. Osnovski read the addresses.

"This one is for Anette," he said, "and here is another one to the same destination! This little writer has always a large correspondence. And this is for you," he added turning to Panni Mashko, "this one is for aunt; and here is for Stephanie . . . The handwriting is familiar. May I leave you for a minute? . . . I'll just take this letter to Stephanie."

"Go, go," returned Osnovski, "and meanwhile we'll read our letters." Osnovski went to the greenhouse examining the letter on his way.

"Positively, I have seen this handwriting before," he muttered; "but whose could it be? . . ."

He found the young people in the hot-house. The girls were painting in their albums. Kopovski dressed in a white flannel suit and black stockings, sat a little behind smoking a thin cigarette.

"Good morning!" said Osnovski on entering. "How are my orchids? . . . Are they not superb! . . . Beautiful flowers! . . . Here is a letter for you, Stephanie, excuse yourself and read it. The handwriting is familiar to me, but I cannot recollect whose it is."

Ratkovska opened the letter and began to read it. In a minute the expression of her face changed, suffused with

a blush, and then it suddenly became pale. Osnovski gazed at her with curiosity. Having finished it she said in a trembling voice,

"It is from——" and she showed the signature to Osnovski.

"Ah!" he exclaimed and at once perceived what it was about.

"May I ask you to spare a moment for me."

"With pleasure, my child," replied Osnovski graciously. "I am at your disposal."

They left the hot-house.

"They have left us alone for once," naïvely observed Kopovski.

Linetti did not answer. She took his exquisitely worked cigarette case from the small table near by and began to rub her face with it. He gazed at her with his brilliant eyes, under whose glance she simply thawed. Linetti knew what to think of him, and his absolute foolishness was no secret to her, still, the grace and enviable beauty of this dullard agitated her plebeian blood. Every hair in his beard had a certain charm for her.

"Have you noticed, that for some time they have been watching us?" continued Kopovski.

But Linetti feigned inattention and continued to rub her cheek with the cigarette case bringing it near her lips. Finally, she said:

"How soft and pleasant to the touch . . . see how agreeable it is."

Kopovski took the cigarette-case and kissed that side of it which had been in contact with her face. Deep silence reigned.

"However, we must leave this place," she said, and taking the flower-pot she tried to place it on a shelf, but could not reach it.

"Allow me to do it," said Kopovski.

"No, no, it will fall down and break. I'll place it from the other side."

With these words she turned around and walked through the narrow passage between the shelves and the wall. Kopovski followed her.

Linetti stood on a pile of bricks and placed the pot on

the highest shelf, but just at the moment of descent the pile of bricks yielded under her feet, and she almost fell to the ground. In the twinkling of an eye, Kopovski clasped her waist and they grew motionless like statues. Finally, he bent over so that her head drooped on his shoulder. He pressed it to his bosom.

"What are you doing ! . . ." she whispered in confusion, exciting him with her warm breath.

Instead of replying he put his lips to her mouth. Suddenly, with a passionate movement, she embraced him, and as if letting loose the fire within her she began to pour down on him burning kisses.

Entranced with their passion they did not observe how Osnovski, having returned to the hot-house, quietly walked on the soft sand to the shelves, stopped short and stared, distracted and pale as a ghost.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

MEANWHILE Zaviloski was preparing for his coming marriage, allowing himself but brief though frequent visits to Pritulovo. His presence at Buchinok was necessary on account of Helena. The latter, outwardly indifferent and cool, surrounded Ignati with real maternal care. On learning through Polanetzki that Zavilovski was looking for suitable quarters to be occupied at once after the wedding ceremony, she requested the former to place in a bank in the young man's name a considerable sum of money.

In his turn, Zavilovski, thanks to his grateful heart, soon became attached to her, as to an older sister. They entertained a feeling of mutual sympathy and confidence. Still, at that time, Zavilovski could spare to her only a small portion of his heart, for it belonged totally to his adored Linetti.

Meanwhile Zavilovski was running back and forth from Warsaw to Buchinok forming new acquaintances. Among others, there was Professor Vaskovski who had lately returned from his pilgrimage to the "Younger of the Arians." The professor's state of health was so unfavorable that the Polanetzki's took him to Buchinok out of compassion. Zavilovski loved him from the first, as a man with a definite idea. This feeling was fully reciprocated by Vaskovski. Having read Ignati's poems, he looked at him with particular curiosity. Once, sitting at the table, after Zavilovski was gone, Vaskovski turned to Polanetzki, and raising his finger said:

"There is a heavenly spark! He does not know for what God predestined him!"

Panni Polanetzki told him about his approaching mar-

riage with Linetti, praising the latter's beauty and kindness.

"Yes," he replied, "she also has her task in life; she is to be a priestess, a vestal for feeding the heavenly flame in that temple. All this impels human progress," he added, after a short pause.

Polanetzki glanced at his wife, hinting that the old man was beginning to grow confused in his thoughts.

"It must be that the girl has a pure soul, if God selected her for that high office," rejoined the professor, after a short interval.

Svirski's arrival interrupted further conversation. Panni Polanetzki was awaiting him impatiently, for he promised to inform her about the result of his explanation with Ratkovska. On entering the room he looked somewhat queerly at Marinya.

Evidently he wanted to speak to her, but not in the presence of her husband or Vaskovski. Perceiving this, Polanetzki came to his help, and pointing to his wife, said:

"The physician advised Marinya as much exercise as possible. Would not you be kind enough to take a walk with her in the garden? Don't I know that you want to speak to her?"

They went out. After some silence, each one waiting for the other to begin, Svirski finally said:

"I suppose you told everything to your husband."

"Yes . . . Stach is so well disposed toward you that I could not conceal it from him."

"So much the better!" he exclaimed, kissing her hand.

"I am not ashamed of it. Well, I was rejected."

"It's impossible! You are jesting!" she exclaimed, stopping short.

But, seeing that the news affected her disagreeably, he said:

"You must not take it to heart more than I. It's done, and I am here before you hale and hearty. No thought of suicide, I assure you."

"But why? What did she answer?"

"Why—I don't know. But her answer—you shall learn. In fact it is only the answer that distresses me.

But it must be confessed that I was not in love with Ratkovska; I simply liked her as I do so many more. I thought she would prove kindly and grateful, and it was time for me to marry,—this was the reason why I proposed. In the beginning it was rather disagreeable to explain, but on recalling that my words addressed to her in Buchinok were not sufficiently clear, I wrote her a letter, and this is what I received in response to it.”

He took the letter from his pocket and began to read: “In the beginning the usual preface. She respects me very highly, would be very happy, proud of me. She feels a true, warm sympathy for me (if she feels the same for her husband, he won’t grow fat on it), and concludes: ‘I am not able to give you my heart with that gladness you deserve, therefore I decided to decline the honor, and if I shall never be happy, I will at least never accuse myself of having been insincere. But, owing to what has occurred, I can write no more. Nevertheless, I beg you to believe me, that I shall always remain grateful for your faith and confidence in me, and pray to God that He might send you a woman worthy of you, and bless your life.’” He paused, then added: “Whatever she writes about me is all bosh. Her words show clearly that she loves some one else.”

—“Yes, it seems so. Poor girl! However, what a warm, sincere letter!”

—“Yes; warm, sincere, honest!” exclaimed Svirski; “they’re all honest, and this adds to my misery. She does not wish to be mine? Very well. It’s her privilege. She is in love. She has a right to that, too. Not with Osnovski, nor Zavilovski, I am sure. Then it’s Kopovski—that idol of servant girls; that dandy, who looks like a wax figure, or a picture in a fashion magazine. Have you ever seen the pictures on linen labels? This is his portrait. If he stood in the window of a barber shop, the girls would break the window looking at him. You remember what I said of him: a male houri! This embitters me, and it does not recommend women. Naturally, bring them a Newton, a Raphael, a Napoleon, they will put above them all a ‘sweet-looking’ imbecile of a dandy. Such are women!”

—"But not all, not all! You, as an artist, must understand what feelings are. Once it builds its nest in the heart, the mind is gone."

"Of course, not all; I know this myself. And to love—what do you say?—will build its nest in the heart, and everything is gone! Maybe! Perhaps love is a disease. But there are diseases which do not affect noble natures; for instance, a hoof malady. One ought to be born with hoofs to have that disease. Do you remember how I once expressed myself at Bigel's about Castelli? And yet she preferred Zavilovski. I am only attacking these false pretensions, those insincere phrases. Do not lie, pretend, or tempt. I know women, and am convinced that Ratkovska is not apt to fall in love with Kopovski; still, it is so! Certainly, I will soon be consoled, but this comedy, this lie disgusts me, that such an ass as Kopovski should prove the conqueror."

"Yes, you are right."

Svirski waved his hand.

"If she married me it would probably come to this that I would actually carry her in my arms. Upon my honor! It would be real bliss . . . Oh, well, she is not the only one in this world. You will have the kindness, I hope, to find for me another girl."

Marinya cheered up, noticing that Svirski was not particularly afflicted by the loss of Stephanie.

"Did you observe," she returned, "that she mentions some incident, due to which she is unable to write at greater length. Do you suspect anything?"

"Possibly, Kopovski had an understanding with her."

"No! . . . she would in that case express herself more clearly. The poor girl has neither money, nor property, and Kopovski, being himself poor, expects a dowry; it is, therefore, rather problematical, if an agreement between them could be reached."

"You're right, though she is in love with him, he will hardly marry her. But this being the case, why does he stay there?"

"Well, they are having sport, and he participates in the game," replied Panni Polanetzki, turning her face away in order to conceal her agitation.

But she knew more. Since her husband imparted to her his misgivings with regard to the relations of Kopovski and Panni Osnovski, she perceived plainly that the young man's courtship of Ratkovska was merely a screen, a pretext. This subterfuge was the more dishonest, if Ratkovska loved him. But the intrigue could not remain a secret much longer, and Marinya reflected: "Is there possibly a connection between what the girl hinted in her letter and Osnovski herself. In this case a calamity really took place—equally disastrous for Osnovski as for Stephanie."

"I'll be in Pritulovo, to-morrow; it must be proven that I entertain no malice toward anybody there. If anything had occurred, you'll know it through me . . . Is Zavilovski there now?"

"No, he is in town. To-morrow or a day after we expect him here. Stach is going to-day to visit my friend, Sister Amelya, who is very sick; unfortunately, I cannot go along. We intend to bring her here."

"Sister Amelya, whom your husband calls Emily . . . She is a true Fra Angelico . . . The face of a saint! . . . I saw her in your house . . . If she were not a sister—"

"Yes, she is very sick. It's the result of unremitting toil utterly beyond her strength."

"Pitiful, very pitiful! . . . Now, you will have two invalids, her and Vaskovski . . . Oh, how kind you are!"

"It's Stach, not I."

Just then Polanetzki was seen in the pathway rapidly approaching them.

"I was told you are going to town to-day," said Svirski, "I'll join you."

"Very well. You are fatigued," added Polanetzki turning to his wife, "take my arm."

They walked to the veranda, and Marinya left to order tea for the guests. Polanetzki returned to Svirski.

"I received just now a telegram," he said, "and did not wish my wife to see it. Osnovski inquires of Ignati's whereabouts, and requests my immediate presence in town. What can it mean?"

"It's queer. Ratkovska wrote to me that something had occurred there," replied Svirski.

"Possibly somebody taken sick?"

"Then Zavilovski only would be called, without me. If Castelli is sick, and if Osnovski did not want to frighten him, he would not have telegraphed to me."

Full of grave forebodings they stared at each other for the solution of the mystery.

XXXIX.

NEXT morning, soon after Polanetzki's arrival in Warsaw, Osnovski rang his bell. Polanetzki opened the door himself. Since the previous evening he had felt uncomfortable. Of course, the likelihood of a sudden explosion in Pritulovo was admissible, but still he could not understand what connection it had with Zavilovski.

Osnovski shook his hand with unusual vigor, and hurriedly inquired :

"Is your wife in Buchinok?"

"Yes, we are alone here," Polanetzki replied.

They went inside. Osnovski sat down, bent his head and kept silent. He was breathing violently. After a short pause, Polanetzki inquired :

"What has happened?"

"A calamity," replied Osnovski with a deep sigh. "Ignati's wedding is not to take place!"

"What?"

"A nasty affair occurred, and perhaps it would be better for Ignati not to know its cause. I hesitated for a long time, but am now resolved that the facts should be laid bare before him. It is more important than his vanity. Possibly his indignation and contempt will help him to bear the blow. In any case, there will be no wedding, for Castelli is unworthy of him; even if it were possible to readjust the relations I certainly would be the first to put a decisive veto on it."

Osnovski began to breathe heavily. Polanetzki, who listened as one dazed, shocked, suddenly jumped to his feet and exclaimed :

"But, my God! . . . What has happened?"

"The two ladies went abroad three days ago, taking with them Kopovski as the betrothed of Linetti."

Polanetzki regained his seat. There was an expression of anxiety and surprise in his face. He stared at Osnovski as if not perceiving the meaning of his words. Finally, he uttered, somewhat incredulously :

“Kopovski, together with Linetti?”

But Osnovski, stricken to the core of his heart by the occurrence, did not heed the form in which the question was put, and continued :

“Unfortunately, yes. You know I am connected with those ladies by ties of blood ; my mother was a cousin of Aunt Bronich, and, therefore, of Castelli Linetti’s mother. You would for that reason naturally suppose that I would endeavor to spare them, but most decidedly not : our relations are severed, and were Castelli my own sister, the resolution would not be changed an iota. As to Zavilovski, I will hardly be able to see him ; we also are going abroad this very day. Besides, I simply cannot muster sufficient courage to tell him everything without reservation. As a friend, you’ll be able to accomplish the task much better and more gently ; I will now tell you what has happened.”

And Osnovski imparted to him what he saw in the green-house. He was agitated and surprised at the feverish attention with which Polanetzki was listening to him. He little thought that there were sufficient reasons why this tale affected Polanetzki’s nerves more than the possible news of Castelli’s or Zavilovski’s death could.

“The first minute I lost my presence of mind,” continued Osnovski. “Though not a hot-headed fellow, it is still a wonder to me that I did not break his bones right there and then. I went away, but soon returned and ordered him to follow me. He was pale but collected. On entering the house I told him that his conduct was mean, that he had betrayed our confidence and hospitality, that Linetti was a trivial girl deserving nothing but contempt, that her union with Zavilovski is hereby dissolved, and finally, that I shall compel him to marry her. They had apparently had time to speak of it, for Kopovski declared that he had been in love with Linetti for a long time and would marry her, and as to Zavilovski he is ready to give him full satisfaction at any moment. I felt

these words were inspired by Linetti, for Kopovski himself is incapable of such a reply. 'Besides,'—he rejoined, —'there is no need of squaring accounts with Zavilovski, as I am not in the least obligated to him; and as to Linetti preferring me—well it's her own free will, and the worse for him.' I don't know what Castelli said to her aunt, with whom she conversed while our explanation with Kopovski was going on, but suddenly Panni Bronich broke into the room, cursing like a witch, denouncing me and my wife for having, she said, interfered with Linetti's natural inclinations, for continually obtruding Zavilovski on poor Linetti, who could not love him, and was crying her eyes out day and night, for making her miserable, and so on—during a whole hour! We are to blame, Zavilovski, everybody, but they are propriety itself!"

And Osnovski rubbed his forehead.

"Ah, dear!" he added, "I am thirty-six years old, and had no conception how far woman's perversity could go. Now I see how capable they are of turning things inside out, of making black appear white. But this capacity for evil, this absence of all moral sense, truth, justice, this egoism—it revolts one terribly. I would send them all to the devil if it did not concern Ignati! Certainly, with them he would be the most unfortunate of mortals, but for such an exalted nature—it is a terrible blow. And Linetti! Who could imagine! . . . Why, he is such a dullard, such a ninny! And this girl,—the bride of Zavilovski! Really, it is enough to drive one mad!"

"Yes, it is," like an echo returned Polanetzki, and both grew silent.

"When did it happen?" Polanetzki, at last inquired.

"Three days ago they left for Scheveningen;—this was just after our explanation. Kopovski had a passport ready. Though he is such a jackass, he had sufficient foresight to prepare that item. To all appearances, the admirer of Stephanie, he intended to go with them abroad, and provided himself, therefore, with the document beforehand. Simulating love toward one, he courted another. Yes, poor Ignati! If he were my own brother I could feel no greater compassion. . . . Well, it is better he did not commit himself to such a girl!"

He took off his glasses, and began to clean them with a handkerchief while blinking his eyes. His face appeared overcast with grief and an expression of wretchedness.

"Why did you not communicate this before?" inquired Polanetzki.

"There was no time, . . . my wife fell sick, . . . she was exceedingly perturbed—nerves. . . . You cannot imagine how deeply this affair affected her! . . . She is so nervous; besides, it happened in our house. To her sensitive nature, this was a terrible calamity: first of all, because she was so mistaken in Linetti whom she loved, then her compassion for Zavilovski, and, finally, the mere contact with such evil and nastiness! . . . It was entirely too much for her pure, chaste nature. At first I was afraid of a severe illness; even now I am not at all confident that it will not affect her nerves. We men can't even conceive what turmoil is produced in the hearts of these pure women at the mere contemplation of wickedness."

Polanetzki looked up at Osnovski with particular attention, bit his lip, but preserved his silence.

"Of course, I at once sent for a physician," continued Osnovski, "and for the second time lost my wits. Fortunately Stephanie and Panni Mashko were on hand. They took great pains with her, and for this I'll be thankful to them all my life. Though Panni Mashko appears rather cold, she is in reality a very kind woman. . . ."

"I think," interrupted Polanetzki, in order to change the point of conversation, "that if old Zavilovski had bequeathed an estate to Ignati, this occurrence would not have happened."

"Possibly. But I am absolutely certain that if Linetti married Ignati, her instinct would draw her to all such Kopovskis that she would come in contact with, be Zavilovski as rich as a Croesus. It's her nature. I doubt if she could ever have sincerely loved Ignati. She is in need of Kopovskis. They ascribed to her various ideal aspirations till she herself believed in her high destiny. She wheedled Ignati out of vanity and ignorance of her own nature. But what is insincere cannot last long, and the interest in Ignati passed. Then they grew anxious about the future, that it would probably prove different

from what they wished; perhaps they were even embarrassed by his ideal aspirations. Besides that expected inheritance—evidently, its non-realization lowered him in their eyes. To this you have to add Linetti's instincts, Kopovski—and you have an answer to all your questions. There are women like my and your wife, but there are also others."

After a short pause Osnovski continued:

"I can foresee the grief and indignation of your wife. It's a pity you did not see how mine received the intelligence, even Panni Mashko. Yes, there are different women, and we ought to thank God every day of our lives for the favor He bestowed upon us."

And his voice grew tremulous with agitation. . . . Meanwhile, Polanetzki thought, how that man, who spoke just a minute ago like a man of sound ideas, could now be so artless. Although his thoughts were preoccupied with Zavilovski, he could hardly abstain from laughter, when Osnovski mentioned Panni Mashko's indignation. An oppressive sense of the irony of life took hold of him; the general disturbance was a natural sequence of it, he thought.

"So you will not see Zavilovski," inquired Polanetzki.

"I really cannot make up my mind to it; besides we are immediately going abroad. I must take my wife away. Her health may depend upon the change of surroundings. Certainly we will not go to Scheveningen. . . . You know my love and regard for Ignati. Don't refuse, therefore, the favor I'll ask of you: write to me how the poor man bore his fate."

And he covered his face with his hands. After a while he exclaimed:

"Ah! how sad, how miserable!"

"Very well, I'll write; but you must send your address," said Polanetzki. "If it is my duty to break the news to Zavilovski, you must render me some help. It's important that the sad intelligence should be communicated to him not by a third person, but by the one who saw and knows all. Otherwise, he might have a wrong conception of the affair, and, as one drowning, catch at a straw of an excuse. You must leave a letter. I'll give it

to him in confirmation of what I am going to tell him; otherwise he might run after them to Scheveningen."

"But he might be here any moment."

"No; his father is sick, and he is at his bedside, expecting me only at noon. Write!"

"Very well," replied Osnovski, and sat down at the writing-table.

"Irony of fate, irony of fate!" reflected Polanetzki, walking to and fro. "How otherwise can you explain what has happened to Zavilovski. Why, for example, that 'swan' with the instincts of a servant girl, that 'priestess,' as only yesterday Vaskovski called her. This very same Osnovski, with his unshakable confidence in the wife, her purity, her chastity, her indignation at the mere contact with filth. And Panni Mashko? It is all a comical farce, in which some deceive others, while the latter deceive themselves; deceivers and deceived, errors, blindness, lies, victims—in a word, a confusion without an end. Yes, a funny, but also desperate irony—and this is our life!"

And here Polanetzki thought of himself. Was he any better? Linetti betrayed a man for the sake of a ducal, while he betrayed his wife for a senseless doll. But she, as a woman of the world, set at naught only words, while he tramples principles under foot. If it was a flagrant injustice for such a girl to become the wife of Zavilovski, how could he be the husband of Marinya? If a single word of reproof could be found for Castelli—and it was impossible not to find them—he should, to be consistent, part with his wife, something that he could never resolve upon.

A grave foreboding, almost a presentiment, took possession of Polanetzki, that, due to some mysterious logic, an awful catastrophe would take place in his life. His thoughts reverted to Zavilovski.

"Poor boy," he reflected; "little does he suspect that Osnovski is at this moment here in my study writing his sentence! And for what?"

At last, Osnovski finished, and opening the door, he said:

"I broke the news gently, but did not conceal anything.

And now may the Lord have mercy on him, and grant him enough strength to bear the blow! I never expected to be a carrier of such intelligence."

"I repeat again my request that you write to me about Ignati," he rejoined, while taking leave. "Good-by. I am hurrying to my wife! God grant that we meet again under more fortunate circumstances. My hearty greeting to your wife. . . . Adieu!"

And Osnovski left.

"What is to be done?" thought Polanetzki. "Send the letter directly, or await Zavilovski here? In such trials it is not the best policy to leave a man alone; but I must go to Buchinok. Besides, nobody could keep him from hiding somewhere. I myself would hide. Well, I must go to Emilyya."

He was relieved a little at the prospect of seeing Emilyya and taking her to Buchinok. He wanted to postpone his interview with Zavilovski until the next day, but on recalling that Ignati, not finding him in, might repair to his country-house, he resolved to await him.

"No; it is better he should learn everything here," he said aloud. "Marinya is in such a condition that the affair must be kept a secret from her. Everybody must be warned to preserve silence on the subject in her presence. It were best that Zavilovski went abroad. I would then tell her that he quarreled with his bride in Schevningen and left her."

He again began to pace the room, repeating:

"Irony of fate, the comedy of life!"

Suddenly the bell at the entrance rang. Polanetzki felt his heart flutter at the sound. He forgot his appointment with Svirski to breakfast together, and was sure that Zavilovski was coming up the stairs. He sighed with relief on recognizing the painter's voice; still, he was so wearied that his arrival displeased him.

"He will let his tongue loose," he remarked angrily to himself.

Nevertheless, he decided to disclose everything, because it could not be kept a secret; and then he wanted to impress on the painter the necessity of being careful, in case he should happen to be in Buchinok. But he was mis-

taken that the artist would weary him with his theories on woman's faithlessness. He simply exclaimed on hearing the news: "A misfortune; an awful misfortune! The devil may take them all!" and he clenched his herculean fists in rage.

Meanwhile, Polanetzki began to denounce Linetti in the most uncompromising terms, forgetting that he was announcing his own conviction by doing so. In general, this conversation relieved him, and his usual presence of mind returned. Deciding not to leave Zavilovski alone, he asked Svirski to take Panni Chavastovska to Buchinok, and to explain his absence to Marinya as a business engagement. Svirski readily consented, and they were soon driving in a cab to Emilyya.

They found her very emaciated, with a transparent face and drooping eyelids. She could walk only with the help of crutches. Heretofore toil bound her to life, illness now was severing her from it. But she did not suffer; this was considered a bad omen by the physicians. As a Sister of Mercy, she was familiar with disease, and understood now that there was no hope of recovery. But this was rather a comforting thought to her. Death was really welcome to her. She even refused to go to Lourdes, notwithstanding her firm conviction that recovery would speedily follow this pilgrimage. She was perfectly contented to remain near the grave of the ever-lamented Lida, and drift gradually into the unknown.

Nevertheless, she smiled with pleasure at the prospect of seeing Marinya again. Svirski was to call for her at five o'clock, in anticipation of which he went with Polanetzki to a restaurant to appease his hunger. At the table Polanetzki said:

"You'll have the kindness to do me another favor. Tell Helena of the occurrence, and mention to her that my wife must be kept in ignorance of it."

"Very well, this very day, I'll walk down to Jasminovka and try to see her. . . . By the way, did Osnovski tell you whether Ratkovska went along with them or remains in Pritulovo?"

"No, he did not. But Ratkovska usually resides with her old relative Melnitzka. If she accompanies them

abroad, it will only be for the sake of diverting Panni Osnovska, whose angelic soul is shocked with the late happening, so absolutely foreign to her pure nature."

"Ah!"

"Why, Ratkovska stayed with the Osnovski only because Kopovski apparently courted her; but since he has the consent of another, there is no reason for her to remain with them."

"It all sounds to me like a fable!" exclaimed Svirski. "So all those women, with the exception of Osnovski, were in love with that hoopoe?"

Polanetzki smiled ironically, and shook his head as if saying: "Without exception, without exception!"

Now Svirski also began his theorizing on the subject of woman:

"I know women, German, French and chiefly Italians. There is more impulsiveness in the latter, they are less developed, but more sincere and simpler. May this macaroni stick in my throat if I ever saw among them such false pretenses, sham and discord. If you only knew what Ratkovska said of that Kopovski! . . . Or even this 'Linetti,' or 'Swan,' or what was she not named—Castelli—a real lily, a mimosa, a Sybil—and whom did she select? Not a man, but a dude, a wax doll. As soon as it came to a test how speedily our Sybil turned into a servant girl.

Svirski clenched his gigantic fist and prepared to drop it on the table, but Polanetzki caught his hand and said:

"But you must admit that there are exceptions among them."

Svirski contended that "they are all alike," and gradually grew open to conviction.

"Do you remember what I said when you asked me about the Bronichs?" continued Svirski. "Canaille, positively, canaille! . . . No principles, no character—in a word, upstarts, that's all! . . . He was a fool, and she—you know yourself. But, as God is holy, I'll go with Zavilovski abroad! . . . Enough of this."

They left the restaurant.

"What will you do now?" inquired Svirski in the street."

“Will look for Zavilovski.”

“But where will you find him?”

“I expect to meet him in the Insane Asylum with his father.”

Just then Svirski saw Zavilovski from afar.

“Why, here he is coming,” he exclaimed.

“Where?”

“On the other side of the street. I could recognize him for a mile by his jaw. I will retire,—this is best told without witnesses.”

“All right,” replied Polanetzki.

Zavilovski also observed them and hastened his step; he was smartly dressed and almost gay.

“My father feels better,” he said holding out his hands to them. “Now I am free, and can go to Pritulovo.”

Svirski pressed his hand and left silently. Zavilovski glanced at him with surprise and inquired:

“Is he not offended at something?”

He looked at Polanetzki and observed that his face was also grave.

“What does it mean, has anything happened?” he inquired. Polanetzki took his arm, and said in an agitated tone:

“Listen, Ignati. I always considered you not only as a capable man, but also as one endowed with an exceptional character. I must impart to you some very unpleasant news, but I am confident that you are sufficiently firm to bear the calamity.”

“What has occurred?” he stammered, pale with fright.

Polanetzki hailed a cab.

“Let us get in,” he said to Zavilovski. “To the bridge!” he added, turning to the driver. After a while he took from his pocket Osnovski’s letter, and gave it to Zavilovski.

The latter hurriedly tore the envelope and began to read. Polanetzki compassionately placed his arm around his waist. He did not take his eyes from the young man’s face, on which now surprise, now incredulity, now fear in turn appeared. It was apparent that though he felt the misfortune, there was still a lurking hope in him. He finally raised his eyes, and stammered out:

"Is it possible? How could she?"

He took off his hat and began to smooth his hair. Meanwhile, Polanetzki interposed:

"I don't exactly know what Osnovski has written to you, but it is true. There is no use of gilding the capsule. Have the manliness to admit that it has occurred, and it is irretrievable. You were to be pitied before, for she was unworthy of you. There are people who sincerely love you. I understand that it is a great misfortune for you. But it is done, my dear Ignati. They have gone away, God knows where, the Oskovskis as well, and there is nobody now in Pritulovo. . . . There is a better future for you in store than that with Castelli. God himself predestined you for that future by bestowing on you such great power; why, you are the chosen of this world. You have duties not only to yourself, but to mankind as well. Naturally, it is difficult to forget at once an object of intense love, and I don't demand it, but you must not, like a common mortal, succumb to despair."

Polanetzki spoke much longer in this vein, but Zavilovski scarcely heard. He was bewildered, and could not give himself an account of the terrible occurrence, the suffering, the trampled principles; he was only conscious that Linetti was no more for him, that she did not love him, that she went away with Kopovski, and he was left alone.

He heard Polanetzki say: "Svirski—abroad—Italy—art;" but he did not understand that Svirski was an acquaintance, abroad—departure, and Italy—a country. All his thoughts were concentrated on Linetti.

"It is all very good," he thought, "but what will it be to me now? How did you forget me and my love—why there was such a bond between us, and I am still the same, your own!" And suddenly his protruding jaw trembled, the veins in his forehead swelled, and a tear rolled down his cheek. Overpowered by that keen agony, Polanetzki wound his arm around his neck, and began to kiss him. Zavilovski came to himself, and his face seemed paralyzed; just then the thought occurred to him that it would not be so terrible if Linetti had died. Death leaves, at least, to believers, a hope of a mutual life in the other world, and to infidels—of a mutual non-

existence, therefore, a common fate. But Linetti deprived him of everything: hope, the right to love, respect, compassion.

Meanwhile, Polanetzki continued:

"Go with Svirski to Italy. . . . The world is large, and you'll find in it many objects of interest and love. Everything is open before you. You'll experience new impressions that will divert and relieve you. Svirski will show you the whole of Italy, open for you new horizons. He is an excellent comrade. You must leave immediately. This is the advice of a sincere and devoted friend. In the spring we—I mean Marinya and myself—will probably go there; you'll see how nicely we'll get along together. Do you promise to leave?"

"Well," Zavilovski answered mechanically, not comprehending what was demanded of him.

"If this be the case, let us return to town and pass the evening together."

Polanetzki ordered the driver to return.

"Where will we go—to your or to my place?"

The noise and movement of the cab sobered Zavilovski a little, for he now looked at Polanetzki sensibly, and replied freely:

"Since yesterday I have not been at home; I passed the night with father. Let us drive to my house; perhaps there are some letters."

Zavilovski found a letter from Panni Bronich awaiting him. The young man opened it with feverish haste, and began to read. Polanetzki watched his face and reflected.

"Probably there is still a lingering hope in him."

He recalled the words of the physician, who in his time remarked about Kraslovska:

"I know what she is, but cannot tear my heart away from her!"

Zavilovski finished, rested his head on his hands and stared stupidly at the papers on the table. Then, as if coming to himself, he said to Polanetzki:

"Read!"

Polanetzki took the letter and read:

"I know you believed in your feelings toward Linetti,

and what has happened will, at the first moment, appear to you a misfortune; but, believe me, that it was difficult for me, as well as for her, to make the decisive step. Possibly, you will not be able to appreciate Linetti (a good deal cannot be appreciated by men,) but still you must know how painful it always was for her to cause the slightest unpleasantness, even to a stranger. But what could be done? This is God's will, which must be obeyed. We act according to the demands of our conscience. Linetti is too honest to give her hand without her love. This occurrence will be a lesson to you as well as to her. If she married you without love, she could hardly afterwards withstand the temptation of a corrupt world. Besides, you have talent, while Linetti possesses only a heart that could be broken at any moment. But if it seems to you that she deceived you, tell me sincerely: who is more to blame? You caused a great deal of harm to Linetti by subduing her free will and not allowing her to follow the inclinations of her heart; for the sake of satisfying your egotism, you were ready to sacrifice her. But this being the case, I am certain she would not live with you one year. Well, may God forgive you, as we do! "Have the kindness to return the ring to the Osnovskis, your ring you will obtain from Ratkovska. Once more, may God forgive you and not deprive you of His benevolence and protection."

"Well, this exceeds all limits of decency," exclaimed Polanetzki.

"I suppose truth can be treated in the same way as love," replied Zavilovski with despairing sadness.

"Listen, Ignati, this is now not only a question of misfortune, but also of your dignity. You may suffer as much as you will, but you must show that you spit on them."

A long pause ensued. Polanetzki, recalling the wording of the letter, repeated several times:

"This is beyond anyone's comprehension! . . . Nevertheless," he added, turning to Zavilovski, "Svirski on his return from Buchinok will step in to see me. Let us pass the evening together and talk of the journey."

"No, I can't, for I promised my father to pass the night with him. We will see each other to-morrow."

Polanetzki thought that attendance on the sick would possibly divert his thoughts from Linetti, and fatigue would dispose him to sleep. He accompanied the young man to the gate of the institution and took his leave.

Zavilovski, having paused there a few minutes and inquired of the nurse about his father's health, returned stealthily home. He lit a candle, reread Bronich's letter and covering his face with both hands began to reflect.

"Thus, Linetti is no more, no future, no happiness, Kopovski took possession of everything! Though she avowed love to me, it was in reality for him!" He recalled how she shuddered in his embrace after the engagement. So now she is trembling in Kopovski's arms! At this thought he grasped his handkerchief, thrust it in his mouth and clenched his teeth, so as not to scream with pain and despair.

"What does it mean?" he exclaimed. "Of what crime am I guilty before her?"

He clutched the letter again, wildly glancing at it here and there, as if trying to find an answer to that dreadful question. But there was no reply, and he felt truth blending with lies, goodness with evil, a turmoil of misery, wretchedness.

"How could you admit that I will bear this parting?"

XL.

FOUR days after the events detailed in the last chapter, the Bigels and Svirski came to Buchinok. It was Marinya's birthday. Panni Polanetzki was at vespers in Jasminovka's church. On learning this, Panni Bigel with the children also repaired there. The men, left alone, began to converse about the latest event, the attempted suicide of Zavilovski, which was the topic of the day in the whole town.

"To-day I was there for the third time," said Bigel, "but the servants had strict orders not to admit anyone except physicians."

"I was not admitted either," returned Polanetzki, "the first two days, though I finally succeeded in passing a few hours with him."

"Will you tell me how it happened?" inquired Bigel, desirous to know all details and pass judgment.

"After our conversation, when I handed him Osnovski's letter, I invited him to pass the evening with me, but he refused, under the pretext of having to see his father. It appears now that he simply wanted to get rid of me, to have perfect liberty to blow his brains out."

"So you were the first to learn of it?"

"No; I did not think such an occurrence as likely to happen, and patiently awaited till morning. Fortunately, Helena Zavilovski came; she was informed of his trouble, and drove immediately to see him."

"It was I who communicated it to her," declared Svirski. "She was terribly affected."

"That Helena is a remarkable girl," observed Polanetzki. "I am still ignorant how it happened, but she was the first to render assistance. Physicians were called, and she ordered him to be taken to her house."

"And what is the professional opinion? Will he live?"

"The physicians cannot decide yet. His hand probably trembled, and the bullet having pierced the forehead lodged under the scalp at the side of the head. It was located and extracted, but it is still an open question if he will live, or retain his memory and reasoning faculties in case he survives."

Although they were all familiar with the event through the newspapers, the intelligence produced a most distressing effect upon the listeners. Svirski, who, notwithstanding his athletic frame, had the heart of a woman, grew pale.

"And all this on account of a worthless girl," he exclaimed.

"And you did not suspect anything?" inquired Bigel, turning to Polanetzki.

"The thought of suicide never occurred to me. Of course, I noticed his despair, and during our ride I observed how his chin trembled, as if he were ready to burst into tears. But you know his pride. He soon gained control over his emotions, and appeared outwardly quite calm. I think," he continued, after a short silence, "that Bronich's letter was the last straw that broke the camel's back. I read it. It is full of rebukes and forgiveness for the evildoers, who stifled their natural inclination—an absurd epistle. I noticed the effect it produced on him. He understood that everything could be corrupted, trampled under the feet—reason, truth, the very foundations of justice, and then this vandalism ascribed to God's will. It cut even me to the quick. Such blatant cynicism and absence of all moral sense!"

And he nervously pulled at his beard; meanwhile, Svirski remarked:

"I think in such cases the most pious is apt to send everything to the devil."

"Yes, there are some," Vaskovski was heard to say as if to himself, "who believe not out of the goodness of their hearts, but simply through despair, as if their atheism exhausted itself. Whoever supposes that behind the heavenly phenomena exists not God, but something unknown, inaccessible, may just as well claim that everything is chance, accident, and the unseen Being only an

abstraction that cannot be loved; then, of course, it is easy to blaspheme."

"All this is beautiful," retorted Svirzki, "but in the meantime, Zavilovski lies there with a wounded head, while they are traveling somewhere beyond the seas, feeling undoubtedly very comfortable."

"And I will tell you that they are miserable," returned Vaskovski. "At first they'll try to persuade themselves, but will never regain their self-respect, and little by little will grow to despise, even hate, themselves."

"Oh, let them go——" repeated Svirski.

In the meantime, Bigel spoke to Polanetzki, admiring the kindness and energy of Helena Zavilovski.

"This will probably give rise to tales," said Bigel.

"Well, she little cares for that," replied Polanetzki. "She has no accounts with the world, and demands nothing of it. Helena is also very proud. The girl was always kindly disposed to him, and the attempted suicide, therefore, unsettled her. . . . You remember the incident with Ploshovski?"

"I knew him personally," returned Svirski. "They say Helena was engaged to him."

"No, she was not; but probably loved him secretly. Such is her fate! After his death she changed completely. For a believer as that girl is, the suicide must have been a terrible blow. . . . That one, and now another! . . . Certainly, she will do everything in her power to save him. I saw her yesterday. She was almost half dead with fatigue—pale as a ghost. Though there are a good many others to nurse him, she would not leave his bedside. Ratkovska told me that she had not slept more than one hour in four days."

"Ratkovska?" inquired Svirski with great animation.

"Yes, I forgot to tell you that she is there with Helena. As soon as she learned of the suicide she immediately went to Zavilovski and begged permission to attend the sick. She is now more like a shadow than a human being."

"So, Ratkovska is there!" repeated Svirski, and mechanically putting his hand in his pocket took out her letter.

Now he recalled her words: "Therefore, I have de-

cided otherwise. If I can never be happy, at least, let me feel that I was not insincere." He understood now the real meaning of the words. Notwithstanding all possible gossip, worldly decorum, her youth, she went to nurse Zavilovski. It was clear now. If she were indifferent to him the girl would not attend him like a Sister of Mercy.

"No, methinks I am a real jackass," murmured Svirski, and anguish took a firm hold of him. He was again yearning for Ratkovska. He did not know what to do with himself.

"I missed it, old dotard that I am!" he thought. "Well, it serves you right! A decent man would feel compassion, while you begin to grind your teeth, denounce her fancied love for that fool, to slander her. Yes, you deserve it well, you jackass! You are not worthy of her."

There was a deal of truth in these self-accusations. Svirski was not in love with Ratkovska, but her refusal cut him deeper than he knew. Not being able to control his affliction he began to denounce women as exemplified by Ratkovska. Now he understood the absurdity of his deductions.

"I deserve it well," he repeated, "if such a girl is not ten times higher than myself, the sun is but worthy to light my pipe. She was certainly justified in rejecting such a bull-dog as I! What a girl! Even by her refusal she did me a favor. With one phrase she set at naught all my theories on women. . . . But I shall see her and tell her my opinion, even if Panna Zavilovski orders a regiment of dragoons to guard the house. . . ."

The next day he repaired to Jasminovska. At first, they would not admit him, but he insisted, and finally gained his point. Helena, who thought him impelled there by compassion and a desire to see Ignati, took him even into the sick-room. The blinds were down, and there was a strong odor of drugs. Both women sat at the bedside, emaciated, broken down, and scarcely resembling their former selves. Zavilovski lay there with mouth open, eyelids swollen and hardly seen from under the bandages. He was completely changed—old—haggard. Svirski was surprised, and in a half audible voice inquired of Helena,

"Has he not regained consciousness yet?"

"No," she replied in a whisper.

"What does the physician say?"

Helena waved her thin arm as if to say that they had not arrived yet at any definite conclusion; after a while she whispered again:

"It's the fifth day."

"But the fever is decreasing," added Ratkovska.

Svirski wanted to offer his services in the sick-room, but Helena pointed with her eyes at a young physician whom he had not observed in the semi-darkness.

"We have two doctors," whispered Ratkovska, "besides some skilful nurses."

"Still you are so worn out."

"It can't be helped, . . . his life depends upon it," replied Ratkovska, throwing an anxious glance at the sick man.

Wishing to instill some courage into the hearts of the young women, Svirski said, contrary to his own belief:

"With such wounds one dies quickly or eventually recovers."

Helena did not reply, but her face grew dark and the lips pale. Evidently, the thought occurred to her that he would die, but she would not despair.

Svirski began to take leave of them. He deemed it inappropriate at the sight of such a tragedy to speak to Stephanie on the subject that brought him there. On coming out on the street he recalled Zavidovski with his head bandaged, changed and aged. Notwithstanding all his compassion he suddenly felt indignant:

"H'm!" he grumbled, "broke his skull; . . . and those kind ladies turn their souls inside out and tremble like leaves over him."

A feeling of envy and commiseration for himself stole upon him.

"Well, and if you, old fellow, were to send a lump of lead through your brain, who would tend you and walk on their toes before you?"

These meditations were interrupted by Plavitski whom he met at a turn of the street.

"And I am just from Carlsbad," uttered Plavitski.

Ah, how many beautiful women are there! . . . I am going to Buchinok. . . . I have already met my son-in-law, and learned that Marinya is hale and hearty. . . . But he seems so depressed, discouraged."

"Yes, some unpleasant things have happened. . . . Did you hear of Zavilovski?"

"Yes. Well, how is he? What do you think of it? . . ."

"Misfortune! . . ."

"Yes, a misfortune . . . and it's all due to those new inventions, your atheisms, hypnotism, socialism. . . . Our youth have ~~no firm~~ no foundations, that's what it is. . . ."

CHAPTER XLI.

POLANETZKI, oppressed by the late events, forgot his promise to Osnovski to write how Zavilovski bore his calamity. But Osnovski, who learned of the fatal occurrence through the newspapers, inquired daily by the cable, as to how Zavilovski got on. For a long time Polanetzki was unable to communicate anything definite or comforting. Only after two weeks had passed did he inform Osnovski that Ignati was fairly on the road to recovery.

Osnovski replied with a long letter in which he detailed to him different items of news from Ostende.

"I am very thankful for the information," he wrote. "So the danger is over? I cannot describe what a burden your information took from my heart. Tell Ignati that not only I, but my wife as well, received with tears of joy the happy news of his recovery. Anette thinks of nobody and nothing else now. Oh, you don't know what women there are. Volumes could be written of them! Anette is an exception, and you can hardly imagine how Ignati occupies her thoughts now. But, thank God, Zavilovski is beyond danger!"

In spite of the autumn weather, Panni Polanetzki still remained in Buchinok, and her husband, after receiving the letter, went first to Bigel where he dined and read the epistle.

"It is comforting," remarked Panni Bigel, "that Castelli is going to marry Kopovski. Otherwise we might fear that Ignati would return to her, when he is well again."

"No, Zavilovski is, after all, a man of strong will," objected Bigel, "and it seems to me that he will never do that. What is your opinion, Stach?"

Bigel had become so used to ask Polanetzki's advice in

all affairs, that even in this matter he could not dispense with his opinion.

—"To tell you the truth," answered Polanetzki, "I cannot vouch for him. I have lost my faith in mankind. I have had a good deal of experience in my life and witnessed so many extraordinary occurrences."

And, saying this, he remembered the expression: "I know what kind of a woman she is, but my heart is with her."

—"And if you were in his place would you return?" asked Bigel.

—"Probably not, but I am not sure of that. At any rate I would not send a bullet into my head. But after all, I cannot vouch for myself."

He said it with evident displeasure, as it occurred to him that he, indeed, was not sure of himself.

—"I don't know what I would give merely to see Zavilovski," broke in Panni Bigel; "but it seems easier to take a fortress than to enter his room. I don't understand why Helena is guarding him so rigorously, even against such devoted friends as we are."

—"Because the doctor has prescribed absolute quiet. Besides, since he has regained his reason, it is painful to him to see even his nearest friends. And that is clear. He cannot speak of his act, but he sees that everybody around him thinks constantly of it."

—"Do you see him every day?"

—"Yes, I am admitted, as I was somehow implicated in the matter from the beginning."

—"Well, does he remember the girl?"

—"No, I questioned Helena and Stephanie about it. And I myself have not heard him mention her, although I have passed hours sitting near his bed. It is very queer, he is conscious and knows that he is wounded and sick, but it appears that he does not remember anything. The doctors say it is always the case with wounds in the head. But he recognizes everybody, and is very grateful to Helena and Panna Ratkovska. He is especially attached to the latter, and he seems sad whenever she leaves him, even for a minute. Both of them, it goes without saying, are extremely kind-hearted women."

—"Most of all, Panna Ratkovska is a surprise to me," said Panni Bigel.

—"Thinking of it, I came to the conclusion that she had fallen in love with him," observed Bigel.

—"Well, it is useless to lose time by thinking," answered Polanetzki, "when it's as clear as the sun. The poor girl tried hard to conceal her feeling until the trouble came. For that reason she refused Svirski. This is not a secret, as Svirski himself confesses it. When Zavilovski made the attempt to end his life, and she learned that Helena had taken him to her house, she went immediately and begged her to allow her to help nurse the wounded man. Everybody understands that it is doubtful, but she does not pay any attention to their opinions; and it is the same with Helena. You say," added he, turning to Panni Bigel, "that Panna Ratkovska surprises you, but consider, what a tragic being Helena is. Zavilovski is, after all, living, but Ploshkovski did not miss, and is among the dead. According to her notions and superstitions, his soul is condemned forever, but, nevertheless, she loves him still. Isn't it tragic in the highest degree? And then, after this suicide, there happens another that opens the hardly healed wounds and causes painful recollections. Panna Ratkovska is disturbed and excited, but Helena's life is broken, and without hope."

"True; but she is probably attached to Ignati, as she is nursing him so devotedly."

—"That is clear; by saving Zavilovski she hopes to obtain the Almighty's mercy for Ploshkovski."

—"Maybe Zavilovski will marry Panna Ratkovska when he recovers."

—"Yes, if he can forget the other, and will recover."

"How is that? You said that he will surely recover."

—"Yes; but it is hard to tell if there will not be fatal complications, and if he will retain all his faculties. Bear in mind that he shot himself in the head. . . ."

The conversation was interrupted by a servant, who brought a letter from Mashko to Polanetzki. He opened it and read:

"I must see you on account of your affair. Will wait on you until five."

"Affairs and affairs!" exclaimed Bigel, when he learned that the letter was from Mashko. "I am really surprised how he manages them all. By the way, do you know that Panni Kraslovska is now entirely blind? It fills one with pity to look at her."

—"Misfortune is a good school in which to teach men," said Panni Bigel. "You know that we always considered Panni Mashko as a cold, unfeeling being; but it is remarkable how devoted she is to her mother. I confess I did not expect it from her. And Panni Kraslovska has also changed for the better; she is not proud and haughty as formerly. It is really very pleasant to see how they love each other. Anyhow, it proves that we failed to find something good in Panni Mashko's character."

—"Yes, they were incensed at the behavior of Castelli," added Bigel, "and Panni Kraslovska told me that if her Theresa should act thus, she would renounce her, though blind and helpless. Panni Mashko is a woman of a better kind."

Polanetzki was not at his ease when Panni Mashko became the topic of conversation, and he took his leave. He did not wish to think of her, and was wondering what her husband had to tell him.

"He wants money again," decided Polanetzki.

But he was mistaken. Mashko was on the edge of an abyss, and he came to confess it to Polanetzki.

—"I am irrecoverably lost," began Mashko, looking sharply at his old friend to observe the effect of his confession.

—"Have you lost the case?"

—"Not yet, but I will lose it in a couple of weeks."

—"Why are you so sure of it?"

—"Well, I have already explained to you the chances for and against my winning the case. It is useless to repeat them, and all these cavils will only confuse you. Perhaps I could succeed in evading the law, if my opponent should not prove too strong for me. He is not only an experienced and able lawyer, but my bitter enemy, bent on ruining me. I once insulted him, and he now takes his revenge. In short, as matters stand, he will

have as easy a victory over me as I would have had over him, were I in his place."

—"You will appeal then?"

—"No, I can't do that."

—"Why?"

—"Because I have more debts than hairs on my head, and as soon as my creditors learn of my defeat, they will fall upon me like birds of prey, and I will be forced to fly."

He sighed deeply, and after a short silence added:

—"I am defeated and ruined; there is no hope for me, but I came to speak with you of your own affairs. Listen! I owe money due your wife after the sale of Kremen; I owe you a few thousand roubles, besides the annuity of your father-in-law; and now I must tell you that in two weeks I will run away, and you will not get a single rouble."

He looked at Polanetzki with the air of a man who has nothing to lose. He expected that Polanetzki would become furious, but in this he was agreeably disappointed. True, Polanetzki's face grew dark, but he soon suppressed his feelings, and said calmly:

—"I always expected such an end."

Mashko, who was expecting that Polanetzki would seize him by the collar and throw him out, glanced at him curiously and thought: "What is the matter with him?" But Polanetzki thought: "If Mashko asks me to pay his traveling expenses, I will not be able to refuse him."

—"This could have been foreseen," added Polanetzki.

—"Oh, no," returned Mashko, who still clung to the idea that his failure was the result of a chain of unhappy circumstances; "you are mistaken; as I have already told you, it could have happened otherwise."

—"But tell me, for Heaven's sake, what do you want of me?" asked Polanetzki, losing his patience.

—"I don't want anything of you," answered Mashko, sighing. "I simply came to tell you—a man who has always been kindly disposed toward me, and to whom I owe, not only money, but gratitude—that I am ruined, and that you should try to save something from the ruins."

Polanetzki gnashed his teeth, and thought: "Go to the devil with the money and your friendship!" but he said:

—"I don't see an escape."

—"There is only one. Nobody knows yet that I will fail, and my note is still worth something. You can sell the house of your wife under the pretense that you have resolved to capitalize your property, or something of the kind. I will help you, and you can easily find a buyer if you will make a lower price. Any Jew will be attracted by the prospect of gain. Let somebody else be the loser instead of you. Be sure that the buyer of the house would not hesitate to sell it, even if he knew that the next day it would not be worth a broken nail. The world is a stock exchange, and such things are usually done there. This is called smartness."

—"No, this is called otherwise. You mentioned the Jews, and I will therefore tell you that there are things which they call dirty. No, I will try to save the money of my wife by other means."

—"As you like. I fully understand the real meaning of my advice, but, in spite of that, I resolved to give it to you. Maybe it is the scrupulousness of a future bankrupt, but I can't help it. I hope you understand what it costs me to speak thus. Anyway, I was convinced that you would not agree to it, but I wanted to show you the only visible means of escape. And now, please order a cup of tea and some brandy for me, as I am exhausted."

Polanetzki rang the bell and gave the required order.

—"Many must lose," continued Mashko, "but I prefer that the losers shall be my enemies and not my friends. There are circumstances when one becomes callous in regard to his conscience. Maybe it is the moral of a Rinaldini, but it is a moral, nevertheless."

The servant brought tea and brandy, and Mashko took a good draught of the brandy, with the evident intention of raising his spirits.

—"Well," said Polanetzki, "you surely know your position better than I do; and you, of course, have made all arrangements necessary for your flight. I will, therefore, only ask you whether you have enough money to accomplish it?"

—"I have. After all, it makes a difference whether you fail for a hundred or a hundred thousand roubles. Anyhow, I thank you heartily for your interest."

Mashko drank another cup of tea with a good portion of brandy, and said:

—"Don't think that I am driven by despair to drink. I am merely tired to death, and the brandy will stimulate me a little. After all, I have not yet given up the battle, and I am still alive, as you see. Here I have lost everything, but I can make it up somewhere else, in the Orient or Paris. The battle-field will not be so limited as it is here. Look at the Barou Hirsch, who had not three hundred francs when he was obliged to leave his country. I know that I am a strong, energetic and able man, and that there is a whole world before me. You will see."

—"Drop the future and let us look at the present," impatiently interrupted Polanetzki.

—"Well, now, I will be branded as a scoundrel, and nobody will think of my losses. My wife's dowry is not touched, and she is secured. I will go without her, but I hope we will not be separated long. She does not know yet of my ruin, and this thought drives me mad."

Mashko dropped his head and sighed deeply.

—"When do you go?"

—"I don't know yet, but I'll soon be able to inform you. Now, I have to ask you a favor: you have just now offered your services—I will accept them, but not in money. There is no doubt that after my flight all our acquaintances will shun my wife, and therefore I entreat you to comfort her and take her under your protection. Will you promise me to do it?"

"It is madness, indeed!" thought Polanetzki, but answered:

—"Yes, I will."

—"Thank you. Now, grant me another favor. You have an influence over my ladies, and they will believe what you say. I ask you, therefore, to justify me in the eyes of my wife. Explain to her the difference between dishonesty and misfortune. Indeed, I am not such a rogue as I will be painted. Consider, I could ruin my wife, but I did all in my power to secure her property; I

could cheat you and get from you two or three thousand roubles, but I don't want it. You will tell all to my wife, and she will believe you. Will you?"

—"I will."

Mashko pressed his burning head and shuddered.

—"This breaks my heart and causes me so much painful anxiety and suffering," said he. And again warmly thanking Polanetzki for his kindness and friendship, he went away.

Polanetzki, leaving soon after, took a cab and drove to Buchinok.

On the road to Buchinok he thought not only of Mashko and his fate, but also of himself.

"I also am bankrupt!" said he, and he was right. This feeling tormented him for some time and he could not get rid of it. He saw around him nothing but misery and ruin, and could not banish the evil foreboding that predicted a wretched future, and his heart was heavy. Lately his nerves were becoming so weak, that he actually grew superstitious. He always returned to Buchinok with the anticipation of finding some calamity at home. To-day he came rather late. He found there Marinya, Emelya and Vaskovski, who were sitting in the parlor. Marinya was initiating Panni Chavastovska into the mysteries of some card tricks. Gazing at her, Polanetzki thought: "Here is a pure, honest soul."

"You are late to-day!" said his wife when he kissed her hand, "but we delayed supper for you."

—"Mashko detained me. Well, what's the news here?"

"Nothing, all's well."

"And how do you feel?"

"Excellent!"

Polanetzki for the first time since his conversation with Mashko heaved a sigh of relief.

CHAPTER XLII.

COLD weather set in about the middle of September. Polanetzki decorated and freshened up his house with flowers. He imagined that he had lost his wife's love, but he was mistaken. He became more distant and polite to her; he acted toward her as if she was his bride and not his wife. Panna Bigel praised the manner of Marinya and her husband, and found fault with her own.

—"With us," she said, "it was different. In the beginning we loved each other passionately, afterward it took a long time before we were able to pull together, and now I would not exchange my old man for all the riches in the world."

—"That was after the birth of the first child," exclaimed Marinya. "It seems to me that real love only begins with that event."

Panni Bigel laughed:

—"And how funny he acted at the birth of our first boy! He looked as if he was gazing at a freak; then he came over to me and kissed my hands."

Soon after the removal of the Polanetzkis to town news was suddenly received from Ostende. One morning Svirski dropped into the office like a bomb-shell, and motioning to Polanetzki and Bigel to follow him into another room, he mysteriously said:

—"Do you know what has happened? Yesterday I received a visit from Krasovski, who has just returned from Ostende. He says that Osnovski has parted from his wife, and gave Kopovski a good thrashing. A terrible scandal! It is the talk of Ostende."

His listeners were dumfounded at this intelligence. Finally Polanetzki replied:

—"It had to happen some time. Osnovski has been blind."

—"I cannot understand it," Bigel said, "a terrible story, who would have thought it."

—"What does Krasovski say?"

—"He says that Osnovski arranged with some Englishmen to go hunting, but missed his train. You can imagine what he found on his return home, that caused him to give Kopovski such a sound beating that the latter is ill in bed."

—"Osnovski loved his wife so much that I should think it would drive him insane or provoke him to kill her," remarked Bigel.

—"This is a woman's love!" exclaimed Svirski.

Polanetzki was silent. Bigel, after walking up and down the room, said to Svirski:

—"I don't understand it at all."

But Svirski, not replying to him, addressed himself to Polanetzki:

—"Do you remember what I told you in Rome at the time your wife was sitting for a portrait? I knew that Panni Osnovski was not worthy of her husband's love, but I never thought she would go so far. Do you think her jealousy of Castelli had anything to do with it?"

—"You are right," replied Polanetzki, "Osnovski was always opposed to Kopovski marrying Castelli, and that is why she tried to marry her off to Zavilovski; but finding that she did not succeed in keeping them apart, she tried to gain Kopovski over for herself by all possible means. It is an old story."

—"Now I begin to comprehend," said Bigel, "but how sad this all is!"

"Sad!" remarked Svirski. "On the contrary, Osnovski felt very joyous. And how he tried to please her! She had everything; money, affection, but she trampled it all under her foot in the dirt. After all Castelli is unmarried—and this one——"

—"Have they really parted?"

—"Very possible, because she has already left. Something fearful must have happened."

—"I wonder what she will do now. Everything is

his," said Bigel, looking at the matter from the practical point of view.

—"If he has not killed her outright he will surely not allow her to starve. He is not that kind of a man. Krasovski tells me that he remained in Ostende to challenge Kopovski, but the latter will be confined to his bed for some time. Castelli and Bronich left for Paris."

—"And what about Kopovski's marriage?"

—"Why do you ask? Certainly, after this open scandal it is impossible. They are all badly left. Let them now hunt abroad for some prince Krapulesko. After the way they treated poor Ignati no decent man will take her. Of course Zavilovski will not return to her."

—"This is what I said to Polanetzki, but he replied: Who knows."

—"Do you really think such a thing possible?"

—"I don't know. I would not even be responsible for myself."

—"Maybe you are right," Svirski replied after looking at him with surprise. "If some one would have told me that the Osnovskis would part I would have called him a fool."

He took his leave, having promised Krasovski to drive with him. Bigel and Polanetzki remained alone.

—"Crime always finds its punishment," remarked Bigel; "but do you know what strikes me very forcibly—that morals with us are getting low. Let us take for instance, Bronich, Osnovski, Castelli—what corrupted women they are, and what is still worse they are foolish, a mixture of the devil knows what with the manners of housemaids. And such men as Osnovski and Zavilovski pay for it often with their very lives."

—"This logic is unexplainable," Polanetzki replied gloomily.

Bigel once more commenced his walk from one end of the room to the other. At last he stopped in front of Polanetzki with a brightened face and clapping him on the shoulder, he said:

—"But we two, you and I, won great happiness in life's

lottery. Although we were not saints in our time, yet no doubt our luck came to us as a reward for not trying to undermine somebody else's family happiness."

Polanetzki did not reply and soon left to go home, where a note, sent by Helena Zaviłovski, awaited his coming, and invited him to come to her after dinner.

—"Is Ignati worse?" inquired Marinya.

—"No, I saw him this morning, but could not see Helena, as she was occupied with the notary Kanonevitz; but I saw Ratkovska and Zaviłovski. He spoke to me and seemed quite lively."

At dinner Polanetzki decided to tell his wife the news, because it was, after all, impossible to hide it. Some one will undoubtedly tell her, and then it will be worse. And when she asked him about the news in the office, he replied:

—"In the office nothing, but in the city they say that things are not as they should be between the Osnovskis."

—"Osnovskis?"

—"Yes, something happened in Ostende, and it seems that the fault lay with Kopovski."

—"What is it?" she asked, blushing for curiosity.

—"I tell you what I heard. It is very unfortunate."

—"But you told me that Kopovski was engaged to Linette."

—"So he was, but now it is all ended."

Marinya was very sorry for Osnovski and spoke with bitterness of his wife.

—"I thought that he would win her love in time, but now I see that she was not worthy to be his wife. Svirski was seemingly right when speaking badly of women."

Plavitska, who came in at that time to share the news with his friends after an early dinner at the restaurant, could tell them nothing new, and Polanetzki was glad that he was the first to impart the news to his wife, for the story as now told by the old man could do much less harm. Despite what he said to the contrary, the old man seemed to be really glad of the news. It made everything in the city livelier.

—"You can say what you please," he said in conclusion,

“but Panni Osnovski is a good one. She got square with every one. Poor Osnovski!”

The old man looked intently at his daughter and son-in-law to see what impression his words made upon them. But Marinya's face showed only great uneasiness.

—“How nasty and dirty it all is!” she said.

CHAPTER XLIII.

POLANETZKI called on Zavilovski after dinner and found him listening to Ratkovski, who was reading from a book of poetry. At his entrance she closed the book.

—"Good evening. Did I disturb your reading? What book is that?"

Ratkovska looked at the book and shook her head with its short hair, which she had cut so that it would not interfere with her attendance on Zavilovski during his illness.

—"Poetry by Pan Zavilovski," she replied.

—"So you listen to the reading of your own poems!" laughed Polanetzki. "Well, how do you like them?"

—"Like those of a stranger," replied the invalid stammeringly; "but I will resume my writing as soon as I get better."

Helena entered the room.

—"I am very glad you came," she greeted Polanetzki. "I want to consult with you."

—"I am at your service."

—"Have the goodness to come with me."

She led the way into another room, where she showed him a seat and sat down. For a time she was silent, as if collecting her thoughts, then she began in her cold and resolute voice:

—"I do not need your advice personally. All I want is to ask your help for my cousin. You know that at my father's death I wanted to choose another path in life, but then this misfortune happened to my cousin, and of course I could not leave my relative at such a time. Now when he is better I want to go my way, leaving him the greatest part of the fortune my father left me. I believe father meant him to have it, and he would have surely made

that disposition of it if he had succeeded in making his will. I will keep more than enough for myself and Ratkovski. Knowing your friendship for my relative, I beg of you to tell Ignati that everything now belongs to him. The physicians say good news will only benefit him ; so much the better. I want him to have the papers immediately," she concluded, with a smile on her pale lips.

Polanetzki shook her hand and inquired with a voice full of agitation.

—"Pardon me, but I would like to ask you one question : What do you intend to do with yourself?"

She seemingly did not care to reply to his question at once, because she said hesitatingly :

—"Every one has a right to do with himself what he choose, and intrust himself to the care of God. Ignati is still very young and good-hearted ; I hope the great fortune will not spoil him. I have done everything possible to save his life and encourage his love of work. Let him write as heretofore and compensate society not only for the shortcomings of himself, but also of those who ruined themselves and their capabilities."

She was quite excited. Her lips grew paler and it seemed as if she was going to break down ; but she soon recovered, and only her clinched hands showed what a struggle it had cost her.

—"Certainly, this will make a great change in Ignati's life," remarked Polanetzki, trying to make her see life from the practical point of view. "I hope your kindness will be for his good. Knowing him one cannot think otherwise, but could you not postpone it for a year or six months?"

—"Why?"

—"For reasons wholly independent of Ignati, but having some connection with him. You must have heard that the marriage of Kopovski and Castelli will never take place. The situation the two women are placed in is terrible. They have acquired a bad reputation by severing their relation with Ignati, now they will see a way out of it. Hearing of his newly-acquired riches they will try to catch him again in their net, and after such a fearful rupture."

Helena looked at Polanetzki intently, and after thinking for a moment replied :

—"I think Ignati will act quite differently."

—"I know what you mean, but you must not forget that he loved her so that he did not care to live after her parting."

Helena, who could always master her feelings, entirely lost control of herself, and helplessly spread out her hands.

—"And what of that!" she exclaimed. "If she contains all his happiness!—No, no, he will not do it!—There are things in which a man is entirely helpless and which are necessary to his life—but I think he will find a better way."

—"Well, I did not expect to hear you speak in that way; but if you think so, let us go to Ignati."

Zavilovski received the information of his inheritance with great surprise and joy; but it seemed as if his joy was hollow, and he only rejoiced because he was expected to. He tried to find out what Helena intended to do, but not receiving a definite reply he kissed her hands; and with tears in his eyes promised her to resume his writing as soon as he got well. Helena spoke to him as a mother would have done: telling him that she considered herself a guest in his house and would leave him in two days. Having prevailed upon her to remain with him at least for another week, he became very happy. But toward evening, as if recalling something, he looked around him with surprise, and said:

—"Strange, it seems to me as if all this happened once before."

To give the conversation another turn Polanetzki said laughingly:

—"Perhaps when you inhabited other planets."

—"Yes, this occurred to me once before," Ignati insisted.

—"Did you write your verses on the moon?"

Zavilovski took the book from the table and said:

—"Let me only get well, and I will write again."

Polanetzki soon took his leave. Ratkovska also left the same evening, returning to her relative Melnitzki.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE parting of Osnovski with his wife and the inheritance of Zaviłovski set the city in a turmoil. Many, who had thought that Panna Zaviłovska took Ignati in her house only to be able to marry him in the end, were stricken dumb with astonishment. Some said that Helena had no right to do with her inheritance as she did, and that they would have acted differently and with more benefit for society. In a word, everybody had something to say. Soon there was a new subject for talk: a rumor reached the city of a duel which had taken place between Kopovski and Osnovski. Kopovski came back to Warsaw a victor and a hero of a love adventure. Women went wild over him.

Osnovski, slightly wounded, remained in Brussels. After the duel, Svirski received from him a letter in which he wrote that he felt well, and would soon return to Pritulovo and then he would start for Egypt.

After reading the letter Svirski said to Polanetzki:

—"I am certain he wanted to die; that is the reason he allowed himself to be wounded. He is a splendid shot; I have seen him extinguish candles with a pistol-shot. I am certain that he easily could have blown Kopovski's brains out if he had so desired."

—"Perhaps!" replied Polanetzki. "Let him go to Egypt and take our Ignati along with him."

"It would do him good. I am going to him now to see how he is."

—"I will go with you. He is well but acts queerly. You remember how proud he was; now, although he looks well, he is like a little child, ready to cry at the merest provocation."

On the way Svirski inquired:

—"Does Helena stay with him?"

—"Yes, he seemed to feel the prospect of parting so badly that she was sorry to leave him. She intended to stay with him for a week only, but two have passed already and she is with him still."

—"What does she intend to do?"

—"I think she will shut herself up in a cloister where she will pray for the sins of Ploshovski."

—"And Panni Ratkovska?"

—"She is with Melnitzka."

—"Did Zavilovski regret her going?"

—"Yes, at first, then he forgot her."

—"If he does not marry her in a year's time I will propose to her once more. She is just the woman to cling to a man with all her heart after becoming his wife."

—"I am certain Helena wants Ratkovska to marry Ignati, but no one knows what may happen."

—"I think he will marry her. As for me it is only a dream. I will never get married."

—"My wife does not believe in your threat."

—"It is not a threat, it is simply my luck."

Their conversation was suddenly interrupted by a passing carriage occupied by Panni Mashko and her mother. Panni Mashko was busy wrapping her mother in a warm cloak and had not noticed their greeting.

—"I went to see them the other day," said Svirski. "She is a good woman."

—"She is a very good daughter to her mother."

—"Yes, I have noticed it also, but it seems to me that she does it more for the sake of display."

Svirski was not mistaken.

Zavilovski was very glad to see them, and at hearing that Svirski intended to leave shortly for Italy he begged to be taken along.

—"So, so," thought Svirski, "that proves that you are not thinking of Panna Ratkovska."

Zavilovski told them that he had long been dreaming of Italy, where he could write better than anywhere else. Svirski gladly agreed.

—"This time I will not remain there very long; I must get back to my work, and, besides, I have promised to be present at the christening at Polanetzki's. Well, what is it going to be?" he turned to Polanetzki. "A son or a daughter?"

—"Whatever God will send," Polanetzki replied, and left for his office, where he was soon interrupted at his

work by the servant, who announced that a lady wanted to see him.

Polanetzki thought it was Pauni Mashko, and anticipated a scene, but he was agreeably surprised at the sight of his wife's face through the glass door. The servant did not know her.

—"Well, you did not expect me, I see."

Polanetzki ran to meet her, and with great emotion kissed her hands.

—"This is a surprise!" he exclaimed. "What brought you to the office?"

With these words he seated her in a chair as an honored guest. By his brightened face, it was easy to see that he was very glad to see her.

—"I must show you something, and as it is necessary for me to take a walk I came hither. And what did you think? It was some one else? Tell the truth."

—"Many women come to see me on business. I confess I did not think it was you. Well, what have you to show me?"

—"Look, what a letter I received:

"My dear! You will without doubt be astonished at my applying to you; but you, as one who is soon to become a mother, will better understand the feelings of a mother (even if she is only an aunt) who sees the misfortune of her child. You will still better understand my desire to lessen the distress of my treasure when I tell you that I am myself the real cause of it. Probably this assertion will surprise you, but it is true. I am guilty; and it was only at my suggestion that that bad, corrupt man dared to put his polluted lips to Linetti's face after she had fainted in the green-house. At any event, I did not make a fuss about it, and ruin the prospects of my child. Certainly the fault lay with Osnovski, who put the question point-blank; but if he suspected something, and wanted in that way to rid himself of Kopovski, may God forgive him! he should not have defended his wife's honor with the price of another's happiness. O, my dear! At first I thought that the best way out of the difficulty would be to promise her hand to Kopovski, as Linetti

lost all claim on Ignati; and I intentionally wrote to him that Linetti was following the inclination of her heart, in giving her hand to that villain, because of her love for him. I thought to diminish the import of the calamity, and that Ignati would be better able to stand the blow. Linetti for Kopovski! But, thank God, that it did not come to a marriage, and as soon as we found out about his behavior we severed all connections with him. Now we cannot think of returning to the old state of things; besides Linetti is disappointed in life and people to such an extent that she would not care to return to them. She does not know that I write this letter. If you could have seen how she was affected by Zavilovski's attempt to take his life, and what she has suffered on account of it, you would be sorry for her. He should not have done it, if only for her sake. But, alas, the majority of men are under such circumstances irresponsible. Poor dear! She was no more to blame than a new-born babe, and I look at her with grief, seeing how she is fading before my very eyes, and is tortured with the thought that she was the cause of his act and has ruined his life. Yesterday she begged me, with tears in her eyes, in case of her death, to take the place of Ignati's mother and take care of him as if he were my son. Every day she repeats that perhaps Ignati curses her, and my heart is torn to pieces hearing the doctor say that if this state of things continues much longer he will not answer for her life. But God is merciful, and I apply to you as to a woman who is soon to become a mother. Be kind and let me know, if only once, of Ignati's health; how he feels, has he calmed down, and did he forget Linetti or does he curse her; so that I can show her the letter and thus lessen her sufferings. I feel that I write illogically and confusedly, but you will understand how I suffer at the sight of this poor victim. God will reward you for it, and I will pray to Him every day that He may bless you with a daughter who will be happier than my Linetti!"

—“Well, what do you think of it?” asked Marinya.

—“I think that they have already heard of Ignati's changed circumstances,” replied Polanetzki. “I also

think that this letter sent in your name was meant for Ignati."

—"Maybe so, but the letter is sincere, and they must be very unhappy."

—"Without doubt they are not very happy. Osnovski was right, when he wrote in his letter that Bronich was mistaken, and tried to delude herself in vain. As to Linetti, do you know what Svirski said about her? Now no decent man will marry her, and if she does get married, it will be either to a fool or an immoral man. They fully understand it, and this is the reason of their unhappiness. And, perhaps, they are also suffering with remorse; but how many tricks and artifices the letter contains. Don't show it to Ignati."

—"Of course, I would not," replied Marinya, whose sympathy was wholly with Ratkovska.

—"Strange!" said Polanetzki, following the current of his thought. "There is so much logic in the proverb: 'What one sows he reaps.' Evil, as a wave striking the shore, recoils."

Marinya began to trace with the tip of her parasol on the floor, and became thoughtful. Then she looked at her husband with her clear eyes, and said:

—"True, my dear, evil returns, but it may come back in the shape of remorse and repentance; then God is satisfied and does not punish any more."

If Marinya could have really known what was passing in her husband's soul, she could not have told him anything more comforting. For some time Polanetzki had been suffering with the foreboding of a coming misfortune, and lived in perpetual fear. He only now understood that it might be caused by remorse. For these words of comfort he was ready to embrace his wife, who shed upon him so much light and goodness, only he feared to excite her in the state she was. He kissed her hand and remarked:

—"You are right, and only too kind."

When Marinya left him to return home, he gazed long after her retreating figure, thinking that she was the only creature he loved, and his love for her would only end with his life.

CHAPTER XLV.

Two days later Polanetzki received a note from Mashko, which read as follows: "I am leaving to-day. Will try to see you. Thank you for your friendship, and hope you will be happier than I am. If possible I will see you in your office at four in the afternoon. Once more I pray you to see to my wife and defend me against her and the people. Once more I thank you for everything. I leave for Berlin at 10 o'clock."

Polanetzki did not expect that Mashko would come to bid him good-by, and though he would be glad to evade a personal meeting, he could not help feeling sorry for the man, so much so, that he decided to go to see him off at the station.

Several persons were already assembled at the station. He noticed Panni Mashko with a veil over her face.

—"Good evening! I came to bid your husband good-by. Where is he?"

—"He went to buy the tickets," she coldly replied.

—"Tickets! Are you also going?"

—"No, he went after his ticket."

At this moment Mashko came in sight. He looked like a traveling diplomat in his long cloak and gold-rimmed glasses. If Polanetzki thought that Mashko would greatly rejoice at his coming he was very much mistaken.

—"Thank you for your coming," he said to Polanetzki with indifference and continued to busy himself with his baggage.

—"You will do me one more favor," he said to Polanetzki after he arranged everything. "Take my wife home or escort her to a cab." And turning to his wife he said: "Pan Polanetzki will take you to a cab."

Then he took Polanetzki aside and said to him:

—"Take her home without fail. Although I have done everything necessary, you will nevertheless be surprised that I left before the trial. The case will be lost whether I stay here or not. That is the reason I wanted to call upon you and tell you; but you know that before a journey there are many things to attend to. The trial will come off in a week from now. I fall sick, and go away, and as the case is in the hands of a young inexperienced lawyer it will undoubtedly be lost, and people will say it was lost because of my absence. I left everything to my wife. I have provided for her. Everything is left in her name. I have not taken from her one grosh. I will join in Antwerp a Ship Building Company. If I succeed in coming to terms with them, the forests in our part of the country will greatly increase in value, and I will probably return. Ploshov in comparison with this enterprise is nothing; but the time is short for details. If it were not for the bitter moments that my wife will have to pass I would struggle against remorse, but now it is overpowering me. Misfortune has befallen me, but nobody is secure from it. But now it is too late to speak of it. Be it as it may, I am glad to know that you will receive your part of the money from the sale of Kremen. If I had the time I would tell you of an idea that came into my head to day. Such ideas do not come to every one. Probably I will have dealings also with your firm. You see I don't give up yet. My wife is provided for. Another would have concluded differently. Don't you think so? But let us join my wife."

Polanetzki was listening to him with displeasure, and thought that it was all the result of a life based from the very beginning on falsehood, and that Mashko, in spite of his intelligence, would never abandon it. Even now at the last moment before leaving he was shamming before his wife and people in the station.

Meanwhile the station was filling up with passengers, and their friends who came to see them off. Several acquaintances came over to greet them; Mashko spoke to them in such a condescending manner that Polanetzki became angry.

—"Who would think that he was running away from

CHAPTER XLVI.

HELENA ZAVILOVSKI also received a letter from Bronich, but did not find it necessary to show it to Ignati, who left a week later with Svirski for Italy, taking leave only of Helena. Polanetzki thought he had acted right.

"It would be unpleasant for Ignati to meet his friends, who would certainly notice his wound, and the fearful change in his appearance. On coming back he will be well, and will be respected as a very rich man."

After their departure it became very quiet in the circle of the Polanetzkis. Their friends were scattered in all directions. Osnovski was in Brussels, and they knew nothing of the whereabouts of his wife. Bronich and Castelli were in Paris. Panni Mashko and her mother confined themselves to their house, living for each other. Panni Chavastovska was laid up in bed, and only the Bigels and Vaskovski remained. But the latter was eccentric, and was considered by many insane. He began to think of death and wanted to go to Rome and die, "on the threshold of the other world." He only waited the birth of Marinya's child.

The Polanetzkis were on this account compelled to lead a monotonous life. He spent his days in the office and she at home, feeling quite unwell. Weeks passed in this way, and their only diversion were the letters of Svirski, who wrote about himself and Zavilovski. In one of his letters he inquired in Zavilovski's name whether Marinya would not like to receive from him letters about his impressions of Italy.

"We often speak about it. He said he thought that you would be pleased to hear about the land that made such an impression on you, and left with you such happy recollections, and that it would make his labor much easier. I

see him every evening. He is writing poetry, but unsuccessfully, I believe. At least, I have not seen any that is of any account. But probably he will be able to do much better in the future with prose in the shape of letters. He often thinks of Helena, and when he is speaking of Ratkovska his eyes brighten. I am always speaking of her in our conversations; if it is my fate to renounce her, nothing can prevent it. You cannot compel one to love you. He whose fate it is to serve in a garden as a stick will not grow and bear fruit."

About the middle of November they received from Svirski the following letter, which furnished the Polanetzkis with much food for thought.

"Just think of it! Bronich and Castelli are in Rome, and I have seen them. You know that I am at home here, and know at once of every new arrival. And do you know what I have done? I prevailed on Ignati to leave for Sicily, for I thought that even if he should fall into the hands of the 'Mafia' he would come out easier and pay less ransom than he would for another engagement ring for dear Linetti. I concluded that if they must sometime meet and be reconciled it would not be through my instrumentality. I don't care to incur that responsibility after what has occurred. He is well, but still very weak both in body and mind, and they could easily entangle him, so that he would repent it all his life. I guessed that they came here for the sake of meeting Ignati, and was very glad to be able to defeat their plans. As a proof that I was not mistaken, I received a few days later a letter in Zavilovski's name. I recognized the handwriting on the envelope as that of Theodor's widow. And, writing on the envelope that I did not know where he had gone, I sent it back to her.

"But this is only the beginning of the story. On the next day I received a letter from Bronich, requesting me to come and see them. I replied that I was busy and would have to refuse myself the pleasure of the visit. To this I received a reply to take pity on an unfortunate woman and either to call or let her know when it would be convenient for her to pay me a visit in my studio. There

was no help for it, I had to go. I was received by Bronich in tears, and she told me a long story in which her Linetti appeared entirely innocent. I inquired how I could serve her, and she told me that her only wish was to hear a kind word from Ignati. The poor girl is coughing badly, and will hardly live through the year. She wants to die forgiven. I must confess that I was softened, but did not give her Ignati's address, which I could not have done even if I desired to do so, not knowing where he had stopped. I perspired as though I had taken a hot bath, and told her that if Ignati ever spoke to me about them, I would try to prevail on him to act according to her wish.

"But this is far from the end. When I was taking leave Linetti entered and asked her aunt to leave us for a few minutes alone. I must tell you that she looks ill and pale, and has grown much taller in appearance, like a tree liable to break in the first storm. After we were left alone she immediately began to say: 'My aunt is trying to shield me, out of her love for me, but I do not want to accept the sacrifice, and will tell you frankly that I am guilty in everything. I am a bad, unworthy girl, and if I am unhappy it is by my own error. I deserve it.' I was astonished: she spoke sincerely, for her lips trembled and her eyes were filled with tears. You will say that I have a tender heart, and I must confess that I was greatly touched and agitated and asked her what I could do for her. She replied that I could do nothing. But begged me to believe her, that she is not an ally of her aunt in her endeavor to renew the acquaintance with Ignati; that after his attempt on his life she fully realized what she had done and what she was; that she will never forget it nor forgive herself. In conclusion she repeated that she was guilty, and begged me to tell Zavilovski at some future time, when he will be able to think that she is not trying to awaken his pity, about what she had told me.

"Well, what do you think of it? Could you believe anything of this sort! I see one thing clearly, that she is sick and unhappy, and that Zavilovski's attempt to commit suicide made a fearful impression on her. Helena was right in saying there is always hope so long as a man

lives. In any event, it is very extraordinary, and I really think that if Ignati would like to marry her now she would refuse him, not considering herself worthy of his love. As to my own opinion, I must tell you that the devil may take me if I will ever do anything to harm her."

This letter made a great impression upon all, and became a topic of conversation in which the change in Polanetzki's opinion became still more apparent. Before he would not have believed it possible that a woman like Castelli could have moral scruples, but now on Panni Bigel's assertion that she did not believe in Castelli's sincerity he said:

—"She is still too young not to be sincere. Her confession of guilt can serve as a proof of that. I remember that Mashko, recognizing that he chose a false road, was always ready with excuses for the reason of his having done so—'With us it is impossible to act otherwise'—'It is the fault of society'—'I pay back in their own coin'—and so on, which was all false. But to confess one's own guilt means that conscience is not entirely dead."

—"Do you think Zavilovski would do right if he should marry her now?"

—"No, I do not think so. On the contrary, I do not suppose it will ever occur."

Soon this conversation gave place to serious anxiety about Marinya's health that began visibly to fail, during the last of November. There were days when she was unable to leave her seat, and in one week changed so much for the worse that even the doctors began to get anxious. Her transparent face turned to a bluish hue. Even Panni Bigel, generally a great optimist, was worried. Marinya did not lose her presence of mind.

But Polanetzki lost his: it seemed to him that all the misery and sickness he had gone through in his life were insignificant in comparison with what he suffered now. Of course, he tried with all his might to hide his fears from Marinya, and listened to the warning of the doctor and Panni Bigel to be careful. But he changed terribly, owing to his anxiety and agitation, and he fell into a sort

of melancholy in which he saw the danger in a greater degree than it existed in reality.

Marinya's natural sickness was greatly complicated by a very serious malady ; her heart was affected, the doctors lost all hope of her recovery. Polanetzki nearly lost his reason, he did not eat or drink and lost every hope. The doctors did not know what was really the matter with her, all they knew was that her heart did not act rightly, and that, even in case of a happy solution, she must die after the birth of her child on account of the weak circulation of her blood.

In the beginning of December Zavilovski and Svirski returned and found Polanetzki in despair. What did he care now about Bronichs and Castellis when his Marinya was dying !

Even Panni Bigel lost all hope.

—"Poor Marinya !" she said to Svirski. "But he is more to be pitied. If she would only give him a child ! Perhaps this would console him. I don't know how he can stand this agony."

In fact Polanetzki suffered terribly. For a long time Marinya tried to delude them with hope she herself did not feel. But one night after Panni Bigel left them, overpowered by her long vigil, Marinya felt very bad and said to her husband :

—"I want to speak to you and ask you for something."

—"What is it, my dear ?"

She thought a moment and then said :

—"I know I will get well—but promise me if I should—if it should even be a boy—you will love him——"

Polanetzki, struggling with his tears, said in a calm voice :

—"As I love yourself, believe me."

Marinya tried to kiss his hand, but not succeeding in this she smiled, then added :

—"One more favor—don't think I want to frighten you—but I would like—to confess."

Polanetzki felt a shiver run through his body.

—"Very well, my child. To-morrow I will invite the priest."

On the following morning she confessed. Polanetzki

was sure the end was near, and even felt astonished that she was yet living.

At midnight she compelled him to go to sleep, refusing to listen to his protestations that he slept through the day, which was not true. At last he had to give in.

He went into the next room and sat in a chair, trying to listen to what was going on in Marinya's room. But he was too exhausted and soon fell into a heavy slumber.

At daybreak he was awakened by a slight knocking at his door. It was Panni Bigel.

He jumped up and went into his wife's room.

—"What has happened?" he whispered with pallid lips.

—"God has sent you a son," Panni Bigel whispered in his ear.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THIS event was followed by many anxious days. Panni Polanetzki hovered between life and death. But youth came out victorious, and one day the invalid, on awakening after a long sleep, was much better. The old doctor could hardly contain himself from the joy he felt, but would not trust to his own judgment and asked for the presence of another physician. Polanetzki went for him and on his return was met by Panni Bigel, who told him with tears of joy that Marinya was much better. She could not speak further, tears were choking her voice. Polanetzki, who only noticed her agitation, grew very pale.

—"She is begging to be allowed to eat," added Panni Bigel, who succeeded in mastering her own feelings. "She asked to see the child, and inquired at what time you would return, and now she is nearly fighting for food. Thank God, thank God!" And she embraced Polanetzki in her joy. Trembling with joy, he kissed her hand. He had suffered so much lately he could not now control his emotion and could hardly keep on his feet.

The doctors in the meanwhile returned from the sick room and replied to the anxious query of Polanetzki with a self-satisfied smile:

—"Thank God! You must be grateful to him."

Polanetzki succeeded in calming his feelings a little, and went into his wife's room. Panni Bigel was already there. Marinya looked much better and brighter.

—"Ah, Stach!" she exclaimed. "You see I am better."

"Thank God, my dear!" he replied, fearing to excite her by his emotion, but he could not help it; and putting his head on the covering at her feet, he embraced them, and remained mute for a long time.

—“Ha!” exclaimed Marinya, with a weak but happy smile; “he does love me.”

From this day she grew perceptibly better. She felt so happy in her returning health that she was ready to sing with joy. They kept her in bed for fear of a relapse.

Her strength returned. A glow appeared again on her face, and the love of life returned. It was to be hoped that she would soon leave her bed. But her long sickness greatly spoiled her, and from a very sensible woman she became a capricious child, getting cross and making “faces” on the smallest provocation. Polanetzki, in trying to please her, was given at times to joking and laughter.

Once she complained to her husband that Panni Bigel refused to give her some red wine. The latter explained that she gave her as much as was allowed by the doctor. Of course, he tried to console her, and spoke to her as he used to speak to Lida:

—“They will soon give my pet some wine; as soon as the doctor comes they will give some to my little one.”

“Red?”

—“Well, if you want red, let it be red!”

Everybody laughed. At times they were joined in their merriment by Plavitski, who had become very serious from the moment of his grandson's birth. Once he brought his will and made them listen to the reading of it. In the beginning, he was taking leave of his life, daughter, son-in-law and grandchild; after, he was informing them how a child should be brought up and educated; and concluded by proclaiming his grandson his sole heir; although since Mashko's bankruptcy he had nothing to leave, and profited himself by his son-in-law's generosity.

But he greatly enjoyed his magnanimity, and felt the whole evening as proud as a pelican, who had fed its young with its own blood.

Like every dangerous illness, the illness of Marinya had taken her back to the days of childhood, with the difference that it took her now weeks to pass the stages which then took years in passing. At first Panni Bigel called her baby, then little girl; but soon the little girl began to

show the traits of a coquettish woman, and when they were combing her hair she demanded that a mirror should be brought to her, and putting it on her knees she looked into it with the intention of assuring herself that Panni Bigel spoke the truth in asserting that she was now more beautiful than ever. She evidently seemed satisfied with the inspection, for she began to smile to herself in the glass, and threatened with her emaciated hand in the direction of her husband's room.

—"Wait, my dear," she said. "Now I will settle with you."

In fact, Marinya was never so beautiful as at the time of her convalescence. Her skin became now even more transparent than in the days when Zavilovski wrote verses in her honor. She looked so delicately beautiful, that one could not look at her without emotion, as she was lying on her pillows.

This was one of the reasons of Polanetzki's love for her as a woman, and besides, he was very grateful to her for remaining alive. He showed his gratitude by blindly fulfilling her every wish, and Marinya became as the apple of his eye—the soul of his life, his thoughts and undertakings. They had always lived a tranquil life, but now it became one of unbounded bliss and happiness.

Of course, the child greatly contributed to their happiness. As Marinya was unable to suckle her child, a pretty but unfortunate nurse, who had formerly served in the house of Marinya's father, was engaged.

She had served after the departure of the Plavitzkis for Warsaw, at the estate of Goutovski, where her misfortune occurred. Who was to blame for it, no one ever knew; but no one could reproach Goutovski with a lack of love for his servants; the proofs of his great love for them were abundant on his estate. The peasants were often heard to say, when discussing their master, "that he rode a white horse, was shooting from a pistol, and looked into the clear eyes of girls." And although Goutovski's habits had nothing to do with the affairs of the peasants, it had much to do with Polanetzki's finding a good wet-nurse on Goutovski's estate for his son.

And as she was young and pretty, the little Polanetzki

had all the best of it. He thrived nicely, and in the moments when free from eating and sleeping, cried in a lucid voice, thus expanding his lungs. His physical improvements were the topics of daily discussions in Marinya's room, where they brought him for his mother's inspection. All kinds of discoveries, as to his mental capabilities, were made by Panni Bigel, who one day came into Marinya's room with the following information :

—"Imagine, Marinya, Stach spread out the fingers of one hand, and with the other he seemed to count his fingers. He will undoubtedly be a mathematician."

—"Then he will take after his father," Marinya seriously replied.

As to Polanetzki, he took to the child, at first touched with pity for his helplessness. But after awhile he began to love him very much, trying to take him in his arms, and carry him, which he did in a manner that made all those who saw him laugh heartily.

In this wise, the life of the Polanetzkis flowed on very happily and joyfully. They awoke every morning with the hope that the coming day would bring them still more joy. And Bigel, who visited them every night with his violoncello, on looking at their life, came to the following sensible conclusion :

"A misfortune may happen to the best people, but until it occurs they live happily."

In fact, they were living happily. Marinya felt sure that the child was only another link in the chain which bound her and her husband. One day she even spoke about it to him.

—"Believe me, I love the child for his own sake ; but how much I love you you will never know," he once said to her.

—"Then tell it to me," she said, blushing with pleasure, and embracing her husband.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

POLANETZKI invited to the christening all his friends and acquaintances. There was among others Panni Chavastovska, who had left her sick bed to be present. Of course, there were also present Plavitski, the Bigels, Vaskovski, Svirski, Zavilovski and Ratkovska. Marinya, nicely dressed for the occasion, looked lovely—so much so, that Svirski, at the sight of her, pressed his hand to his head, and exclaimed:

—“This is more than a mortal can bear! Who can look upon so much beauty and not become blind!”

—“And what did I say?” exclaimed Polanetzki, with as much pride as if no one had noticed it before him.

—“On your knees, ye people! I will say nothing more!”

Marinya blushed with pleasure at this compliment, and began to prepare the child for the ceremony. As the first godparents, officiated Bigel and Chavastovska. In the second pair were Svirski and Ratkovska. Svirski would not under any pretext be the godfather of the child in common with Ratkovska, but on being told that they were to officiate only as the second pair, and that this would not be an obstacle to his marriage with Ratkovska, he consented.

The child, who was held by Bigel during the ceremony and was very unruly, accidentally touched his spectacles and broke out into a loud wail, but noticing the spectacles instantly stopped.

After the ceremony he was given to his nurse, who put him into a pretty baby-carriage, a present to the child from Svirski, and was about to wheel him away, when Svirski stopped her and took the child out of the carriage.

—“Carefully! Carefully!” exclaimed Polanetzki, coming over quickly to his side.

—"Do not fear!" Svirski said to him. "I have held in my hands not only children but the most precious works of art."

"And, in fact, he knew how to get along with children as though he had been nursing them all his life. Coming over to where Vaskovski stood, he said to him:

—"Well, my dear professor, what do you say to this little Arian?"

—"What is there to be said," replied Vaskovski, looking at the child. "He is every bit an Arian."

—"And a future missionary?"

—"He will not escape it in the future, as you have not escaped it."

But the young man seemingly did not care for his future, and started such a cry, that he had to be speedily transferred to the arms of his nurse.

But the women were talking of him and proclaiming him a beauty and a genius of the future.

The genius was soon sound asleep. And meanwhile breakfast was served. The hostess placed Zavilovski next to Panna Ratkovska, as she wished to see how Zavilovski would act towards her. He seemed entirely well and rational, but not very energetic. In Italy he used to blush at the mention of Panna Ratkovska's name and tears appeared in his eyes, but now he seemed entirely indifferent to her. And she became very sad. Marinya tried to bring about an interest between them, but failed signally. And he soon began to talk of another journey in which to all purport Panna Ratkovska would not share.

Sitting near her at the table, he silently and with great relish partook of his food and looked displeased. Panna Ratkovska gazed on Zavilovski with eyes full of pity.

Marinya tried to bring Zavilovski closer to Ratkovska, and, bending over the table, she said to him:

—"Why don't you tell Panna Ratkovska and me something about Rome?" and, turning to Ratkovska, said: "You have never been in Rome?"

—"No, I have not, but I have read a great deal of Italy. Of course, reading is not seeing," she replied with a blush.

—"You remind me of the letters about Italy you

promised to let me read," Marinya again addressed Zavilovski.

—"I did not write them at the time, it was too hot. Now I intend to write a great deal."

After dinner Svirski said to Marinya, indicating with his eyes to Zavilovski:

—"Do you know what impression he makes upon me? —that of a very valuable vessel, but a broken one."

CHAPTER XLIX.

A FEW days later Svirski made a visit to Polanetzki in his office to inquire about his wife's health. He found him about to start for his home, as he and Marinya dined that day with the Bigels.

—"She is well and so is the boy, and you cannot imagine how happy and thankful I feel. What do you intend to do with yourself?" he asked Svirski, who went with him a short distance.

—"I intend to leave for Florence, where I have some work," replied the painter. "On the way I will stop in Rome, and this is what I wanted to speak to you about. This morning I received a visit from Ignati, who offered to go along with me."

—"And you agreed?"

—"Well, what could I do? Although I love him very much, he is sometimes unbearable. He has broken down."

—"Yes, he is to be pitied, and so are Helena and Ratkovska, who expected so much of his talent."

—"Poor girl! He seems not to be thinking of her, and it is very fortunate that Helena had provided for her future."

—"I will wait another year," said the painter, "and if he does not marry her in that time I will propose once more. You will be kind enough to tell her that I had nothing to do with his going."

Their conversation was interrupted by the appearance of Osnovski, who came out from a fruit store with a package in his hand.

—"Look, here comes Osnovski!"

—"Yes, this is he, but how he has changed!"

In fact, Osnovski was very changed, and meeting his friends he was undecided what to do: to pretend that he

did not see them or to address them. At last he made up his mind and came over to them. He began to speak of the weather, the grapes he bought and other indifferent matters, and all felt very uncomfortable. At last Polanetzki said :

—"I believe you intend to leave for Egypt?"

—"I intend to do so. It is very lonely in the village, especially when one is alone——" and he stopped, noticing that he spoke of things of which he did not intend to speak, and soon left them.

—"Really one could wish him to die. I don't know how he stands it," said the painter.

—"After all this misfortune and after such love as he felt for that woman!"

—"What can he do—he has to live?"

—Certainly he had to live, but he did not know how. Neither on his estate nor in Warsaw was life possible, he could not stop thinking of her. And so, in sheer desperation, he undertook a journey to Egypt. But, leaving Warsaw in very bad health, he was taken sick with influenza on his way to Vienna, and was laid up in that city. Typhoid fever followed the influenza, and in a few days he was dangerously ill and unconscious, lying in a hotel, attended by strangers, far from home and friends. In his delirium he continually saw before him a beloved face, and he began to inquire about it from the Sisters of Mercy who were attending him, and he grew very despondent.

CHAPTER L.

THE life of the Polanetzki after Zavilovski and Svirski once more left for Italy flowed as tranquilly and happily as ever. They hardly saw anybody beside the Bigels, but felt very happy in their small home circle. Polanetzki was greatly occupied at that time and spent a great deal of his time in the office transacting business of which he told no one anything. After his work he used to come home happy and contented. He loved his wife with a quiet, honest love, not only as a wife but as a woman, calmly, without extremes of joy and despair.

"I believe I am turning into an Osnovski," Polanetzki often thought. "But I can safely do so. My Marinya will never be a Panni Osnovski."

The baby thrived wonderfully and was a continual source of joy to them.

In the beginning of February Polanetzki began to spend considerable time away from home, attending to very important business, and spent whole hours with Pan Bigel in the office consulting with him about something. But the latter part of the month he spent at home only going out with his wife and son for a breath of fresh air. They saw very few, and the only news they heard was through Panni Bigel. In this wise they learned that Panna Ratkovska had established an asylum for children with the money given to her by Helena, and that Osnovski had left for Egypt, not alone but with his wife, with whom he became reconciled after his sickness. Kresovski, who once served as Mashko's second, saw them together in Trieste, and told Polanetzki that Panni Osnovski had the manner of a "repentant sinner." Knowing himself how a man softens in misfortune, and how sincere his repentance may be, Polanetzki replied to him that: "if her husband took her back no honest man ought to rebuke her or to be more rigorous than her husband."

Soon after another rumor reached them from Italy—a rumor which greatly surprised not only them but all

Warsaw. It was reported that Svirski had proposed to Castelli and they would be married after Easter. Marinya prevailed upon her husband to write to Svirski and inquire in regard to the truth of the rumor. In ten days they received the following letter in reply to their question:

"You ask me, if it is true? No, my dears, it is not true. But to explain to you why such a thing is impossible, I must tell you of Zavilovski's condition. He came to Rome three days ago from a tour through Italy which he had undertaken on my advice. To-morrow he will leave for Greece. Meanwhile he spends his time with me day and night. Seeing that he acted rather queerly I tried to make him talk, and asked him if he had written any verses during his last travels, and do you know what happened? At first he became very pale and replied that he had not commenced to write as yet, then he threw his hat on the floor and began to cry like a little child. I never saw anybody exhibit such suffering. He ran around the room and cried that he had ruined his talent, that he had nothing left in him, that he will write nothing more, that he preferred death to being saved by Helena. This is what is going on within him, and people are saying that he does not write because he is rich and has no incentive to do so. I am afraid he will remain like this. They have ruined the poor fellow, killed his soul and talent, blew out the fire within him that would have given warmth and light to every one around him. This, as you see for yourself, I cannot forget. God be with her, with that Castelli; but she should not have plucked from him the feathers with which to fashion for herself a fan to be immediately thrown away. At one time in Warsaw I said that she could marry now only some prince Krapulesko, because no one else would take her. But probably there are many who would, but not I, because I am not a Krapulesko. One can often forgive wrongs done to himself, but never those committed against others. This is all I have to say about this matter, the rest you know yourself. I will wait a year and then once more propose to Panna Ratkovska. Whether she will accept me or not, in any case, God bless her, and this is my last decision."

—"Strange," remarked Marinya who was reading the

letter together with her husband; "from whence such rumors originate?"

The reply to this question she found continuing to read the letter.

"This rumor must have originally spread from my being seen in the company of the two ladies. You remember the letter which Bronich sent me and Linetti's confession of guilt? You also remember my pity for them. No matter what I say, but my compassionate heart is sympathizing with them in their unhappiness. You will understand yourself that they suffer. I have seen how uncomfortable they feel when meeting acquaintances, and how the latter treat them according to their principles. So much anger has accumulated in their hearts that as Vaskovski says, they will soon begin to throw up. Their situation is in fact a very precarious one. God be with them! I well remember Helena's words that one must not lose faith in a man so long as that man lives. Poor Linetti! She looks very bad and is losing her beauty. I still feel very sorry for her, also for Bronich, who has made everybody tired with the recital of her wrongs and the lies she tells in defending her Linetti. I am sorry for them, but I do not know whether I will be able to go to them again after what I witnessed in poor Ignati. But I am not sorry I went to see them. People will gossip, but in a year they will see that they spoke foolishly."

Further he spoke about the reconciliation of the Osnovskis, of which Svirski heard a good deal. "God is merciful," he wrote, "and if He is punishing any one it is only for the purpose of compelling him to repent of his sins. I now believe even in the regeneration of Panni Osnovski; perhaps it is artless of me to think so, but I sometimes think that there are no extraordinary bad people in the world. Just look, even Panni Osnovski had something in her, and when hearing of her husband's illness, she went and nursed him through it. That is what a woman can do! They turn my brain, and I will soon stop believing not only in them, but in everything else."

Further, there were questions about their health, the health of the child, good wishes, and a promise of return in the spring.

CHAPTER LI.

SPRING had already arrived—an early spring—warm and pleasant. Polanetzki again began to leave home for whole days at a time, and to sit locked up with Bigel till late in the evening. This state of things continued up to May. Marinya, who wanted to know what was going on, did not care to ask her husband, hoping that he would tell her when the time arrived. But he became lately so excited that she decided to ask him at the first opportunity.

In fact, in a few days she was given the opportunity. One day Polanetzki returned from the office much earlier than usual, and although his face was very earnest, he seemed filled with joy. Looking at him, she could not help asking:

—“What has happened? You look so very happy!”

He sat down near her, and said to her in a kind of strange voice:

—“What lovely weather we have to-day, and how warm it is! Thanks to the weather, I was led to think that it would be good for yours and Stach’s health to remove to the country as soon as possible.”

—“Yes—if we are in possession of Buchinok,” she replied.

—“Well, Buchinok was sold long ago,” said Polanetzki, taking her hands in his, and gazing lovingly into her eyes. “I have thought of something else, which will surely rejoice you; but you must give me your word that you will not get too excited, and you will listen calmly to what I have to say.”

—“I promise.”

—“Well, you see, my child, after Mashko left, his creditors fell upon his estates so as to get at least some of their money. The estates were sold at auction. Mageroska was sold, but Kremen, Skoki and Suchatin remained, and I succeeded in purchasing them for you.”

Marinya looked at him for some time, scarcely believing her ears. But he spoke so very earnestly she could not

help believing him; her eyes filled with tears, and she threw herself in his arms.

—"Stach!" she exclaimed. She could not utter another word, but in that exclamation was felt so much love, gratitude and reverence for the man who was so good to her.

—"I knew you would be glad," said Polanetzki, pressing her to his heart. "And your joy is my greatest reward. I remembered that you loved Kremen—that is why I bought it for you. But what is Kremen? If I had bought for you ten Kremens, I would still be unworthy of you."

He spoke sincerely. But his wife removed her tear-stained face from his bosom, and said:

—"It is I who is unworthy of you. I never thought of being so happy."

And they began to dispute as to who was the most worthy, kissing and embracing in turns. She felt like crying and laughing at the same time, for joy and happiness. Her Stach not only loved her, but did more for her than he had ever promised.

—"Well, Marinya," he said, walking up and down the room, not without considerable pride depicted on his dark face. "Now the work will have to be begun. You know, that I understand very little about an estate; this will be your duty. Kremen is a large property, and we will both have plenty to do."

—"Will not this purchase cramp you in your business?"

—"In my business? No, no. I made an excellent bargain; besides, I remain in the business as heretofore; and to tell you the truth, even if Kremen should vanish to-day from the face of the earth, we would still have enough left to live on."

—"I am sure you will succeed in everything you undertake," she said, looking at him with a pride and reverence as though he stood before her the greatest of heroes. "But I am sure that you bought Kremen only to please me."

—"You are right; I bought it because the grave of your mother is on this estate; because I love you, and you love Kremen, and only for your sake I bought the place. I remembered what you said about Kremen when in Italy at the time Mashko tried to sell the estate to

Bukatzki. Every word you say becomes impressed on my mind, and thus it was in regard to Kremen. I bought it, but refrained from telling you before, for I wanted to surprise you—you are my dear beloved little wife.”

And Polanetzki again kissed her hands. She wanted to return his caress, but he playfully prevented her, and they began chasing each other around the room like a pair of children.

Marinya wanted to go to Kremen immediately, but he threatened that he would get jealous of the estate and sell it.

—“No, you would not,” she replied, shaking her head.

—“Why?”

—“Because you love me.”

He replied by a shake of his head.

To the great joy of Marinya, her husband told her that at the end of the week they would leave for Kremen with the entire family, as everything was in readiness for the reception of the young mistress of Kremen. Suddenly he began to laugh.

—“I wonder what your father will say to all this?”

These words were a new source of joy to Marinya—a joy she was not compelled to hide very long. In a half-hour her father called. He had hardly shown himself in the door when Marinya ran to meet him, and threw herself on his neck and told him the news. He was astonished and deeply moved; his eyes filled with tears. And to hide his emotion he began to speak of the heat, and of his hope that they would find on the estate a corner for him. At last he took Polanetzki’s head between his hands, and added:

—“I hope you will, with the help of God, manage the estate with your general good luck, as well as I managed it. Of one thing you may be certain: that I will be always ready to help you with my advice, and will never refuse to be of service to you in the matter of administration.”

That evening they spent with the Bigels; and Marinya, overflowing with joy, said to Panni Bigel, pointing at her husband:

—“Can anybody help loving a man like my Stach?”

CHAPTER LII.

THE Polanetzkis were met on their arrival at the estate by the domestics, who had prepared the house for their reception. Marinya, with tears in her eyes, inspected every nook and corner. She spent a sleepless night, and as a consequence remained late in bed the next day, which was Sunday. This prevented her going to church, as she had desired, and she had to postpone this duty until the afternoon. Polanetzki had meanwhile taken a good look at the estate, and came to the conclusion that it would need plenty of money and work to bring it into proper shape, as it had been left in a very bad condition. But this did not discourage him in the least. The young owner felt that with money, labor and health everything would be brought into a very satisfactory state. But the work must be begun immediately.

Returning to the house, Marinya came to him, and, laying her head on his bosom, pointed to the crib in which lay their sleeping child, her face suffused with a lovely blush.

They went in company with Plavitski to the church. The day was filled to overflowing with joy and the warmth of springtime. A host of memories filled Polanetzki. He remembered his former journey with Plavitski to Venter at the time of his first visit to Kremen. The dear, joyful being sitting beside him now was not with him at that time. He recalled their misunderstandings, Lidia, their marriage, the different stages of their life and happiness. He felt that he had gained in Marinya much more than he expected. And that if a misfortune should happen now it would be easier to bear it together. On arriving at Venter he prayed on the grave of Marinya's mother with

the same feelings he would have had at the grave of his own mother.

The bells rang and they left the church. Again Polanetzki's thoughts reverted to the past. Everything was familiar to him, as though he had left there only the day before. In front of the church they were surrounded by Marinya's former friends and neighbors. Plavitski looked around for Panni Yamish, but learned that she was in the city: Pan Yamish looked hale and hearty, and was delighted at the sight of Marinya.

—"Ah!" he exclaimed, kissing her hand. "My dear little housekeeper, my darling birdy, my golden Marinya came back after all to the place of her birth! What a beauty, what a pretty girl, who is now the mother of a promising son!"

Marinya flushed with pleasure. Zasimski, with half a dozen children, joined them. On their heels followed Goutovski, the former admirer of Marinya and rival of Mashko. He looked as clumsy as a young bear, as he drew near to Marinya and greeted her with a sigh for his lost happiness. Marinya replied to his greeting, slightly confused, but Polanetzki cordially shook his hand and said to him in a solemn voice:

—"You see I am also here, and very glad to see the old friends of my childhood. How do you do?"

—"As usual," replied Goutovski.

Yamish, who was in very good spirits, said to Goutovski in a joking tone:

—"They say that the work of the peasants will be better managed."

Goutovski became very confused. Every one was speaking about the want of proper management of the work of his peasants. This, and the sale of his woods, was the only thing that could save him, as otherwise he could hardly hold on to his estate much longer; but he could do nothing with his peasants, who invariably reproached him every time he spoke to them about it, with their "Master riding a white horse, shooting from a pistol, and looking into the eyes of pretty girls."

Sometimes Goutovski could not contain himself, and cried to his peasants:

—"The devil may take the lot of you. What is there in common between pretty girls and the management of the estate?"

But the peasants would not submit to him.

In the meanwhile Marinya invited Yamish, whom she greatly respected, to dinner. Plavitski, who greatly missed Panni Yamish, also invited Goutovski for a game in cards.

This compelled the Polanetzki to return speedily home and have everything in readiness for their guests. They were followed by Plavitski and Yamish, Goutovski bringing up the end of the line in his britzka.

On the way Plavitski said to Yamish:

—"I can say that my daughter is very happy. Polanetzki is a good man, very energetic, but——"

—"But what?"

—"Too close-fisted. Do you remember how he pressed me for the paltry twenty thousand I owed him, and I was compelled to sell Kremen, which he now has bought? If he had not pressed me then he would not now have had to buy it. He could have had it for nothing after my death, as the inheritance of Marinya. A good man, but he is as yet empty here," pointing to his own forehead.

—"Hm," murmured Yamish, not wishing to tell him that if the estate had remained in his hands there would have been nothing left of it by this time.

—"And now," added Plavitski, "I have new cares, as I practically will have to take upon myself the management of its affairs."

Yamish nearly burst with laughter, and could hardly keep from saying: "God forbid!" Plavitski himself did not believe in what he was saying.

Marinya, as a good hostess, had everything in readiness, and met her guests at the door with her child in her arms.

—"Before we sit down to the table let me introduce to you my son," she addressed Yamish. "A big boy, a polite son, a daisy."

And she held the baby out in the direction of Yamish, who touched the child's face with his hand, which made the "daisy" frown, and then let out a fearful scream, that sounded like that of a parrot or a raven.

Meanwhile Goutovski came in, and after hanging up his coat in the vestibule, he began to seek for a handkerchief in his pockets. By mere chance Rosalia, the young nurse of Polanetzki's child, passed him; seeing Goutovski she came to him, and after bowing to the very ground, she shook his hand.

—"Well, how do you get along? What do you want to tell me?" inquired her former master.

—"Nothing. I only wanted to greet you," she replied humbly.

Goutovski began to look for some change in his vest pocket, but she did not wait for a tip, and went into the nursery. Goutovski joined the company.

At the table they began to discuss the removal of the Polanetzki's into the country. Yamish, as a counsellor and a polite man, took upon himself the rôle of spokesman, and, turning to Polanetzki, said:

—"You come to the country without the knowledge of the management of a large estate. But you come with something which many landowners do not possess, namely, money and the ability of an administrator. And I am certain of your success. Your return is a source of great joy to me, not only for your sake, but that of my dear pupil. It proves the truth of what I have always asserted, that the majority of us old landowners will have to leave the soil; but that our children and grandchildren will return to it more able and better qualified for the struggle with life, with more calculation and with traditions of labor. Do you remember what I have said to you more than once, that the soil has a mighty power over us, and that it constitutes our sole wealth? You were not of my opinion then, but now you have become a landowner yourself."

—"It was done for her sake," replied Polanetzki, pointing toward Marinya.

—"For her sake!" retorted Yamish. "And you thought that my theory excluded women, and that I did not know their worth? They grasp their duty with their heart and cling to it with all their strength. And the soil is our duty as much as our wealth."

At which Yamish, who, like all other counsellors, liked to hear himself speak, half closed his eyes, and continued:

